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Tuesday, 6 January 2009, 5 p.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Kouchner	(France)
Members:	Austria	Mr. Spindelegger
	Burkina Faso	Mr. Kafando
	China	Mr. Zhang Yesui
	Costa Rica	Mr. Ballestero
	Croatia	Mr. Jurica
	Japan	Mr. Takasu
	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	Mr. Shalgham
	Mexico	Mr. Heller
	Russian Federation	Mr. Yakovenko
	Turkey	Mr. Babacan
	Uganda	Mr. Butagira
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Miliband
	United States of America	Ms. Rice
	Viet Nam	Mr. Le Luong Minh

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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09-20097 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 5.20 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite the representatives of Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Norway, Qatar and Saudi Arabia to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian National Authority, whom I welcome, to participate in this meeting in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I propose, with the consent of the Council, to extend an invitation to participate in this meeting, under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, to His Excellency Mr. Amre Moussa, Secretary General of the League of Arab States.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

This is a moment of great urgency. The international community is mobilizing, as attested to by the presence of President Abbas, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States and Ministers from Arab States, countries members of the Council and other States. The number of victims is in the hundreds, and in the thousands if the wounded are included. Many are civilians. Just today we have seen the tragedy at the Al-Fakhoura School, near Jabaliya. In the face of that tragedy, my country has decided to do everything possible to bring an end to the violence.

Following two days of discussions in the region — in Sharm el-Sheikh, Jerusalem, Ramallah, Damascus and again in Sharm el-Sheikh — the President of the French Republic has achieved the undertaking of negotiations on a permanent ceasefire. At a press conference with President Sarkozy, President Mubarak has in fact just proposed a plan aimed at finding a way out of the crisis. In particular, President Mubarak has called for Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Palestinian factions to meet in order to take every step necessary to end the escalation, including border security and the reopening of border crossings. We await Israel's response, but we have the hope that it will be positive. The Security Council should encourage and support those promising efforts. All States of the region should support this momentum and contribute to this hopeful initiative aimed at moderation and restraint.

The immediate priority is to end the violence. My country has condemned Israel's ground offensive against Gaza, just as it has condemned the continued launching of rockets. We call for an immediate humanitarian truce. The fate of civilians is the most urgent concern.

France reiterates is call for a complete and immediate cessation of rocket launchings, and for a halt to all Israeli military operations. France would also like to reiterate the need to establish the necessary conditions and guarantees for a lasting ceasefire, the main elements of which are well-known. They include supervision of the implementation of the ceasefire; a return to normality in Gaza, which includes the permanent opening of crossing points; and a halt to the smuggling of weapons into Gaza. International oversight mechanisms may prove to be necessary, and we are prepared to contribute to them.

Beyond that, it remains crucial to return to peace negotiations. There is no military solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, not in Gaza or anywhere else. The solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must be based on the process charted at Annapolis and on the establishment of a viable Palestinian State living side by side with Israel in peace and security. In particular, we must work on the basis of the Arab Peace Initiative to address the Israeli-Palestinian and Israeli-Arab conflicts in a comprehensive and practical manner.

Europe encourages the essential reconciliation that must take place among Palestinians. We support efforts by everyone to that end.

France has acted with all its partners in the international community, in particular those in the European Union, to put an end to this crisis. My country believes that the Security Council has an essential role to play, which should take into account the reality of the situation on the ground in order to effectively establish the conditions for a lasting ceasefire. In that regard, I shall listen to the various statements to be made here. I hope that we will be able to take decisive action in the Council in support, in particular, of Egypt's efforts, as well as those of the League of Arab States committee and others, along the two fronts that I have outlined, namely, an immediate halt to violence and the establishment of the necessary conditions for a lasting ceasefire.

I welcome the presence among us of His Excellency Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, to whom I give the floor.

The Secretary-General: As the Council meets to address the grave crisis in Gaza, I welcome the leader of the Palestinian people, President Mahmoud Abbas, who is recognized by the members of this body as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. His presence, and that of high-level representatives of members of the Security Council, as well as of Arab and other Member States, is a reminder that we must move from debate to action, and must do so immediately.

The situation on the ground demands nothing less. The Israeli military operation, with the stated purpose of bringing an end to rocket attacks by Hamas militants and a change in the security conditions in southern Israel, is in its eleventh day. Israel has intensified its air bombardment and sea attacks into Gaza. These attacks have caused damage and destruction both to Hamas militants' facilities and to public infrastructure, mosques, schools and homes.

Hamas militants have continued to fire rockets at Israel, most recently reaching 30 kilometres from Tel Aviv. Three days ago, in a further escalation, Israeli troops entered the Gaza Strip. There have been fierce clashes in heavily populated areas, including in and around Gaza City and in refugee camps.

According to the Palestinian Ministry of Health and media sources, over 570 Palestinians have already been killed and over 2,700 injured. United Nations teams are unable to confirm figures due to the dangerous situation on the ground, but objective assessments, including those based on visits to hospitals, suggest that the numbers are credible.

Israeli sources have confirmed the deaths of five soldiers and another 50 are injured, in addition to four civilians killed and dozens injured by the more than 500 rockets launched in the last 11 days, some of which have struck homes and schools.

As this conflict has escalated, I have repeatedly condemned indiscriminate rocket attacks by Hamas and the excessive use of force by Israel. I have called for an immediate end to the violence, and I have warned that if these appeals went unheeded, civilians were inevitably going to continue to be killed in large numbers. Today, at United Nations facilities in Gaza, that is exactly what has happened. Three United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) schools, set up by the United Nations as places of refuge for civilians fleeing the fighting, have been hit in adjacent Israeli strikes. The third strike, at a school in the Jabaliya refugee camp, has killed dozens of civilians.

These attacks by Israeli military forces, which endanger United Nations facilities serving as places of refuge, are totally unacceptable and should not be repeated. Equally unacceptable are any actions by Hamas militants that endanger the Palestinian civilian population. Today's events underscore the dangers inherent in the continuation and escalation of this conflict. I call once again for an immediate ceasefire.

In the midst of this fighting, the civilian population of Gaza faces a humanitarian crisis. Entire families, including women and children, have perished in the violence, as have United Nations staff and medical workers. There are no shelters for the vast majority of the civilian population. Food and fuel supplies are insufficient. A million people have no electricity. A quarter of a million have no running water. The only answer is an end to the violence. Whatever the rationale of the combatants, only an end to violence and a political way forward can deliver long-term security and peace.

I have been actively engaged with regional and world leaders to bring the violence to a speedy end. I

stressed to President Bush today the importance of acting immediately, and I had valuable consultations with Arab leaders yesterday and today, including President Abbas. My envoys and I have been working to facilitate the emergence of a consensus, and I will continue my efforts with regional and world leaders, including many already gathered here in New York.

I am gratified by the most recent initiative by President Mubarak and President Sarkozy for a way out of the current impasse.

I also intend to travel next week to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory and to regional capitals. But I do not believe we can wait until then to end the violence. We must achieve that now.

To do so, there must be an immediate ceasefire, that is durable and respected fully by all sides. Immediate humanitarian measures, including open crossings for humanitarian assistance, should be ensured.

In addition, viable international mechanisms will be required to ensure that borders are properly functioning. This must include a plan to ensure that the crossings operate as envisaged in the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access and that smuggling from any direction is addressed. Third parties will need to provide assistance, both on the ground and in terms of diplomatic support, to supervise and safeguard all the various elements of a ceasefire.

Gaza's enormous social relief and reconstruction needs will have to be addressed. A consolidated account of the current humanitarian needs, including the urgent appeal by UNRWA, has been issued by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. I urge all Member States to respond promptly and generously to this appeal.

We urgently need to achieve Palestinian unity and the reunification of Gaza with the West Bank within the framework of the legitimate Palestinian Authority. We must also see the urgent continuation of negotiations for a political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which we worked so hard for in 2008 but did not achieve.

This Council has the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. I hope that the Council will act swiftly and decisively to put an end to this crisis.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian National Authority.

President Abbas (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): I have come bearing a message from a wounded people who are being subjected to a new tragedy of destruction, killing, siege, unremitting violence and lack of respect for the most basic human rights.

The massacre today in the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) school at the Jabaliya refugee camp is new proof of the heinous crimes being committed against our people. I come to bear witness to the suffering of the people of Gaza. Children fall before their mothers. Roofs fall on entire families. The cries of the innocents, in their agony, rise. Death and destruction spread throughout every village and every camp.

Gaza today is witnessing a new Palestinian catastrophe. It has been over 60 years since our first catastrophe. The Israeli machine of destruction continues to kill and to commit the most heinous of crimes. It continues to do so despite unprecedented international unanimity in calling for an end to this massacre of innocent civilians, who do not deserve such brutality or such blind aggression.

Before laying out the details of possible solutions to the impasse we face, I call on this Security Council to take the necessary first step to save our people in Gaza. This Council must adopt a resolution calling for an immediate and full cessation of Israeli aggression. The cannons must fall silent so that the voice of dialogue can be heard and a political settlement to this major crisis and this human tragedy can be found. Any delay in ending the fighting and killing will only deepen the tragedy that we have all lived in the past few days. Any delay will make all our people, particularly the young, feel that placing hope in peace and relying on international legitimacy and commitment to international law are all pipe dreams that will never bear fruit and that the present and future offer nothing but more extremism, violence and destructive wars.

The choice before the members of the Security Council is clear-cut. Any message they choose to send

to the peoples of our region — indeed, to all peoples of the world — calling for an end to the aggression will reiterate and underscore the fact that the United Nations will not ignore the tragedy of our people today or allow the Middle East to fall victim to a cycle of bloodshed, extremism, violence and new hatred.

The widows and mothers of Gaza who walk with their children in the streets; the thousands of wounded in hospitals; the corpses under the roofs of mosques, schools and homes; the mothers and fathers who cannot bury their children under the hail of bombs and fire; the Arab and Islamic peoples and, indeed, public opinion around the world will accept nothing less than an urgent intervention by the Security Council to halt the firing and stop the aggressor.

That is my message, which I believe cannot be subject to any compromise, procrastination or delay. There is an urgent need to lay a firm foundation upon which we can build towards a comprehensive political settlement of this destructive and bloody conflict. Let me state that a commitment to respect any agreement we may reach is necessary to avoid the tragedy being repeated. It means providing effective and sufficient protection for all our people and establishing an international force that will help them regain security and peace, contribute to ending the unjust siege that has suffocated Gaza for so long, assist us in opening all border crossings — particularly those between the Gaza Strip and Israel and at Rafah between the Gaza Strip and Egypt — in accordance with international agreements and ensure a comprehensive, reciprocal and permanent ceasefire.

In that regard, I would like to express my appreciation and support for the plan set in motion today by Presidents Mubarak of Egypt and Sarkozy of France.

Our people in the West Bank, in Al-Quds Al-Sharif and in the Gaza Strip have suffered enough under Israeli occupation, the settlements, the separation wall, the hundreds of checkpoints and the detention of over 11,000 of our people in Israeli jails. It is enough. All those present are aware of that and of our belief in international legitimacy. We seek and defend international legitimacy to confront the policy of occupation and its measures, to put an end to Israel's stranglehold on our future and to ensure our right to independence and self-determination.

That is why we seek above all the application of international law and agreements with regard to the borders and crossing points. We do not want anyone to feel threatened. No one's security should be threatened and we want no one to threaten our security. I do not believe that, in the context of the settlement we seek, the Council can condone the ongoing unjust siege and blockade imposed on our people in Gaza, where all elements of a normal life are negated. How can a people — any people — remain deprived of food, medicine, electricity, water and all necessities for development, construction, movement and travel?

A lasting end to the siege is non-negotiable. It is essential if peace is to prevail. Let me stress that when the aggression against our people stops, we shall relentlessly continue to work to overcome our internal Palestinian crisis by restoring national unity, based on the resolutions adopted by the Council of the League of Arab States, which provide for a national unity Government that would oversee simultaneous legislative and presidential elections. The only way to restore unity is through dialogue.

In that regard, we would like to express our sincere appreciation for the efforts being made by President Mohamed Hosni Mubarak of sisterly Egypt to encourage national reconciliation and unity and for the unanimous resolutions of the League of Arab States on the need to pursue efforts in that regard.

I should like to emphasize that we will accept no formula that would impose the status quo through separation and allow steadfast Gaza to remain an entity separate from the body of Palestine. The Gaza Strip has undergone all the stages of our national struggle and has fought hard to maintain our Palestinian national unity. It was the birthplace of our national liberation movement and has held high the flame of independence and freedom. How can we accept a fate for Gaza other than that of being an integral and proud part of a united Palestinian nation — one independent Palestinian State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital?

I should like, Sir, to thank you, your friendly country and the entire international community for their sincere messages of peace, calling for an immediate end to the aggression. I would like to pay tribute to the important role played by the agencies of the United Nations, particularly UNRWA, to save our people and to ensure that they receive the basic essentials of life. I appeal to all to provide the

necessary assistance to those agencies, to all civil and international organizations that are saving the lives of our wounded people and to those seeking to convey an accurate picture of the new catastrophe to the world. I should like to thank all Arab and friendly countries that were quick to provide humanitarian and medical assistance. Let me express the hope that such support will grow to contain the huge consequences of the tragedy we are facing. I should like to express my appreciation for the efforts being made by Egypt and Jordan to ensure that this assistance reaches its targets.

The experiences of the past few decades have proved that military aggression, however massive, cannot be a viable and lasting solution to conflict. The continued suffering of our people through killing and destruction will not bring our people to its knees. That people, like any other, will accept nothing less than freedom and justice. We shall remain committed to the path of just peace, committed to continuing the political process and true to the commitments we have undertaken, based on the balanced solution set out in the Arab Peace Initiative and under international law and resolutions of international legitimacy.

We know that some Powers wish to abort the two-State solution. They wish to bury the chances for peace under the rubble of the war against steadfast Gaza. We put our trust in this Council's role and in its determination to prevent such nefarious circles from harming the interests of our peoples.

The resolution to be adopted by the Security Council on the cessation of aggression and war against Gaza must reiterate the need for the political process to continue under genuine and effective international supervision in order to ensure that an independent Palestinian State will be created within the 1967 borders and with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital; that a just and agreed solution will be found to the issue of Palestinian refugees in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 1948; and that all detainees and prisoners will be released.

Like all the rest of the Palestinian people everywhere, the people of Gaza are a people of peace. They have fought for peace in the past and will continue to fight for peace in the future. Let us give them the peace that they deserve today and put an end to the genocide and destruction. Let us not allow the killing of one more Palestinian child. Let us not allow one more Palestinian mother to cry for her children. We must not allow it. We must put an end to the massacre of my people. Let my people live and let my people be free.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Ms. Shalev (Israel): I thank the Secretary-General for honouring this meeting with his presence.

Eight years: For eight years the citizens of southern Israel have suffered the trauma of almost daily missile attacks from Gaza. For eight years more than 8,000 rockets and mortar shells have targeted Israeli towns and villages. For eight years the residents of these towns have had a bare 15 seconds to hurry, with their children and their elderly, to find cover before rockets and missiles land on their houses and schools. Fifteen seconds would not give the members of this Council time to leave this room. No State would permit such attacks on its citizens; nor should it. But Israel sought every way to avoid the current conflict.

In 2005 Israel removed from Gaza every one of its soldiers and every one of its 8,000 civilians, along with their homes and schools, their synagogues and cemeteries. We did this to try to create an opening for peace, and for Palestinians to build a prosperous society.

But the Hamas regime that brutally seized control of Gaza, murdering scores of fellow Palestinians, has no interest in peace and prosperity. It is vehemently opposed to negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians. It rejects the Annapolis process which was commended by this Council last month in resolution 1850 (2008). Hamas has no interest in making peace with the enemy. For Hamas, peace is the enemy. Its only interest is in establishing a regime of tyranny for Gazans and of terror for Israelis.

Hamas likes to tell the Palestinians that it was terrorism that brought Israel to withdraw from Gaza in 2005. But the truth is plain to see: it was the hope for peace that led us to withdraw from Gaza, and the terrorism of Hamas that compelled us to re-enter. In our efforts to avoid confrontation, we also agreed six months ago to an Egyptian-brokered *tahadiya* — a situation of calm. Hamas violated this arrangement on a daily basis. Over 365 rockets and mortar shells were fired during this period. And all the while it used the so-called calm to build up its supplies of weapons and

rockets, smuggled through tunnels into the Gaza Strip. Yet still we restrained ourselves.

But then, Hamas unilaterally announced the end of the *tahadiya* and began to wage a new campaign of rocket attacks against Israel's citizens with the weapons it had smuggled into Gaza during the calm. Then, we could not restrain ourselves any longer. With its new Iranian-made missiles, Hamas is now able to reach as far as the cities of Ashdod and Beer Sheva, placing over one million Israelis in the shadow of its terror.

Many in this Chamber have condemned Hamas's terrorist attacks, and we welcome this statement of basic principle. But the families at home in the city of Sderot and the children at school in Kibbutz Netiv Ha'asara will not be protected by these condemnations.

In the face of such terrorism we have no choice. We have to defend ourselves, not from the Palestinian people, but from the terrorists who have taken them hostage; not to gain territory or power, but to demonstrate that our restraint was not weakness and to give our citizens the basic right of a normal life.

In this campaign, Israel has dealt the Hamas infrastructure a major blow. Dozens of its terrorist factories and training bases have been destroyed, its stockpiles of rockets have been significantly depleted and many of the tunnels used to smuggle weapons have been put out of action. But we have not only sought to change reality for our citizens; we have also sought to uphold the values that set us apart from the terrorists.

Hamas rejects every core humanitarian principle. Instead of waging its battle openly between combatants, it directs its attacks against civilians. Some have called these attacks "indiscriminate", but that is not the case. Hamas attacks are very discriminate, directed deliberately at innocent men, women and children. In the past week alone, Hamas rockets have landed on a school and on a kindergarten.

Hamas shows a similar disdain for the lives of Palestinians. It has adopted the terrorist tactic — the coward's tactic — of using civilians as shields while its leaders themselves flee from combat with Israel's soldiers and make pathetic demonstrations of bravado from their bunkers. It hides its missiles and terrorist bases in homes, hospitals and mosques, and, as we saw earlier today, deliberately launches attacks from in and around schools and United Nations facilities, with tragic results.

For Israel, every civilian death — Israeli or Palestinian — is a tragedy. In responding to terrorist attacks that show no respect for human life, either Israeli or Palestinian, Israel takes steps to protect both. It takes every possible measure to limit civilian casualties, even where those measures endanger the lives of our soldiers or the effectiveness of their operations. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) have dropped tens of thousands of leaflets and made thousands of phone calls to Palestinian civilians, beseeching them to leave the areas of terrorist operation to avoid harm. But let this be clear: failing to respond to terrorists simply because they are using civilians as cover is not and cannot be an option. To do so would simply broadcast an invitation to every terrorist group in the world to set up shop inside a hospital or a kindergarten.

Unlike the Hamas regime, which has targeted crossing points to prevent the entry of aid and has prevented Palestinians from boarding ambulances, Israel respects its humanitarian responsibilities. It has permitted Palestinians in need of medical aid to enter Israel for treatment and has set up a special humanitarian situation room to coordinate with the aid organizations working in Gaza. Since the start of the fighting, Israel has facilitated the entry into Gaza of more than 540 trucks, delivering more than 10,000 tons of humanitarian assistance. In fact, just a few days ago, Israel was asked by the World Food Programme to halt supplies of food shipments since the warehouses were full.

It is time for the international community to place responsibility for the humanitarian situation in Gaza where it lies: on the shoulders of the terrorists who have chosen violence over peace. It lies on the shoulders of those Hamas leaders who, from their bunkers and luxury hotels in Damascus, have abandoned the people of Gaza and have chosen to endanger and exploit them rather than protect them.

This conflict is a fundamental clash between two world views, between moderates and extremists, between those who seek to preserve life and humanity and those who glorify death and destruction. As Hamas spokesman Fathi Hamad was proud to announce on Al-Aqsa Television,

> "Palestinians have created a human shield of women, children the elderly and the jihad fighters, as if to say to the Zionist enemy, 'We desire death as you desire life'".

For that reason, there is — and can be — no equivalence between Israel and the Hamas terrorists we are confronting. There is no equivalence between a State that equips civilian homes with bomb shelters and a terrorist regime that fills them with missiles. There is no equivalence between military commanders who struggle daily to ensure that their operations are conducted in accordance with the requirements of international humanitarian law and the terrorists who flout that law by keeping Corporal Gilad Shalit captive, without even allowing the International Committee of the Red Cross access to see him — for 930 days. There is no equivalence between a State using force in exercise of its right to self-defence and a terrorist organization for which the very resort to violence is unlawful.

No doubt, there will be much discussion today about the credibility of the Council and the need for a resolution. But the credibility of this Council is measured not by the pieces of paper it issues, but by the values it upholds. Is the Council's credibility strengthened when it calls for a ceasefire that effectively equates a terrorist group with a State defending itself against it? Does anyone here truly believe that Hamas will heed the words of this Council?

This is not about a "ceasefire" with terrorism or a mutual cessation of hostilities. It is about ensuring the end of terrorism from Gaza and the end of smuggling weapons into Gaza, so that there is no longer a need for Israeli defensive operations.

This conflict will end not when terrorism is appeased or accommodated, but when the international community stands determined and united against it. Anything less than that will only embolden Hamas, lengthening this round of the conflict and accelerating the next. Anything less will reward Iran, the coward's coward, which hides behind terrorists as they hide behind civilians, and encourage its worldwide efforts to use Hamas and other terrorist groups to fight its wars on the cheap. And anything less will be a major setback for hopes for peace and prosperity for the Palestinians. As long as Hamas rules Gaza, rejecting the Quartet principles and seeking Israel's destruction, Gaza can never be part of a Palestinian State.

There are many in this Council who speak in favour of peace. But it is not enough to support peace; we have to confront those who work to destroy it. For that reason, the current military operation is not an obstacle to peace; it is a prerequisite for peace.

We, the people of Israel, listened to the international community when you told us to withdraw from Gaza and promised that that would give us the credibility to respond forcefully should Gaza turn into a launching pad for terrorism. We listened when you promised us that acting with restraint during the period of calm would give us the credibility to fight back should the rocket attacks resume. Now is the time for you to make good on those promises. In the clash between life and death, between building societies and destroying them, Hamas has taken its side. Now there is no choice but for the international community to take a side itself.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now invite His Excellency The Right Honourable David Miliband, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, to take the floor.

Mr. Miliband (United Kingdom): There could not be a greater contrast between the daily regime of delicate diplomacy at the United Nations and the day-to-day reality of death and destruction in Gaza, but the two are linked. The United Kingdom believes that the crisis — and I use that word advisedly — in Gaza is an indictment of the collective failure of all of us, over a long period, to bring about the two-State solution, which offers the only hope for security and justice for Israelis and Palestinians alike.

The two speeches that we have just heard, from President Abbas and Ambassador Shalev, define the challenge for this Council. Both were moving, deeply felt and passionate. I believe that, in this debate, we cannot simply restate our national positions; we have a wider responsibility to support all efforts to achieve an immediate ceasefire and to chart a course back to the common vision set out just three weeks ago in Security Council resolution 1850 (2008).

As we meet, lives are at stake and new initiatives are under way, notably from President Mubarak and President Sarkozy, to engineer new action for a

ceasefire that engages Israel and responds to its security concerns. The United Kingdom supports those initiatives. We in the Council now need to use our discussions over the next 24 hours to be clear in our principles and practical in our conclusions to reinforce those efforts.

The truce of June to December 2008 was, in truth, less than that. Rockets were fired into Israel, Palestinians died in Israeli military action and the people of Gaza suffered greater and greater deprivation. However, the immediate trigger for Israeli military action was the end of the truce. Hamas rejected its extension and fired almost 300 rockets between 19 December and 27 December 2008. Those rockets are not just a danger and a provocation — though they are that. They demonstrate a choice by Hamas, not just to target the people of Israel, but also to target the fragile negotiations for peace, sponsored over the past year by the United States.

However, the immediate consequence of Israeli military action over the past 10 days is also clear: 600 dead, many of them civilians and children — the horror of war piled upon months of deprivation. The confirmation just a few hours ago that 30 civilians were killed today in a United Nations school in Gaza is a devastating reminder of the urgency of our responsibilities.

Earlier today, the Quartet envoy called the situation in Gaza "hell". The shortages of food, fuel and medicine are, according to our reports, acute. The scale of the suffering is immense. The need for humanitarian supplies is urgent. In this context, it is right to salute the leadership not just of the Secretary-General, but also of the brave United Nations workers trying to relieve suffering in Gaza.

The United Kingdom stands four square behind the Security Council statement of 28 December calling for an immediate halt to all violence. I reiterate today the call of my Prime Minister for an immediate ceasefire. But we are enjoined to come to the United Nations not just to make declarations, but to seek common ground and to find common purpose, so we must focus on the substance and permanence of a ceasefire, as well as on its timing.

Israel is right to say that the flow of illegal arms into Gaza is a threat to its citizens and needs to be curbed. We say that we need to support countries in the region in developing the tools to tackle the trafficking of weapons from land and sea. This will be a complex and difficult task, but it is essential.

Meanwhile, the Palestinian Authority is right to say that it concluded an agreement in 2005 on the opening of crossings for people, goods and aid into Gaza. We say that we need to open those crossings and re-establish the authority of the Palestinian Authority over them. This will help the people of Gaza. It will also undercut the smuggling trade.

The permanence of a ceasefire depends on something else. President Abbas is a powerful and consistent advocate for the interests of all Palestinians, whether they live in Gaza or the West Bank. The unity of Palestine is essential to any decent vision of the future. It is also a precondition for a democratic politics of consent in which there is one legitimate authority and in which every Palestinian has a voice in the only process that counts: the peace process.

The test for us over the next 24 hours is simple: will we help to bring an end to the current conflict and pave the way back to the vision the Council set out three weeks ago? Our starting point must be the goals of an immediate ceasefire, an end to arms trafficking and an opening of the crossings. But we also have a responsibility to keep alive the vision of a peaceful Middle East in which Palestinians have the dignity of statehood and Israelis have recognition and security from their neighbours. That is the responsibility of the Council, that is our task today and those are responsibilities and tasks that the United Kingdom wants to help resolve.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ali Babacan, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Turkey.

Mr. Babacan (Turkey): This is the first official Security Council meeting that Turkey is attending as a non-permanent member. I would like to pay tribute to the French presidency.

Let me also welcome President Mahmoud Abbas and the Ministers of the Arab League delegation, who are here to brief us about the current situation in Gaza.

We are confronted with a tragic situation. Today is the eleventh day of the attacks against Gaza and the fourth day after the launch of the ground assault. As Israeli forces continue to operate in Gaza, the crisis further deepens in scope and impact and civilians

continue to take the brunt of the misery. Every step in escalation takes us further away from peace.

The situation in Gaza is indeed very grave. In this regard, we deeply regret the loss of civilian life. It is highly regrettable that civilians have become victims. Just today for instance, a United Nations-run school in a Palestinian refugee camp in Gaza was hit by Israeli missiles, killing more than 40 people who were using the school as a shelter. The people of Gaza are also faced with a severe shortage of all basic needs, including food and medical supplies. Infrastructure is almost entirely damaged. Thousands of people have lost their homes. In short, what we face in Gaza is a human tragedy. Israel's military operations against Gaza constitute a disproportionate and excessive use of force and must therefore be immediately stopped.

Such punitive measures, which harm the well-being of the entire population, can serve nothing but fomenting further resentment. Let us not forget that the Palestinians, who are being bombed and attacked today, will be Israel's neighbours forever. In the same way, it is impossible to understand the closure of the crossings to humanitarian assistance for weeks and months, leaving the Gaza people in total isolation and deprivation.

Given all these facts, we cannot allow the situation to continue any longer. The international community and the Security Council cannot stand idly by while innocent civilians lose their lives. We must try to put an immediate end to the ongoing tragedy in the region. Otherwise, the responsibility of inaction and indifference will be impossible to bear.

Moreover, the tragedy in Gaza could have very negative implications on the whole region. Efforts towards stability and a durable peace have already taken a serious blow. Bearing in mind all of this, and bearing in mind the dire consequences that we may face, we urge all the sides to act with restraint and in a responsible manner. No one has anything to gain from this dangerous scenario.

It is within this approach that Turkey continues its active diplomatic efforts, trying to contribute to a course of action which will help bring peace, security and stability to the region. To that end, our Prime Minister has visited Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Saudi Arabia to meet with his counterparts, including President Mahmoud Abbas. We also hosted the extraordinary ministerial meeting of the Executive Committee of the Organization of the Islamic Conference last Saturday. Based on those visits and our extensive contact with all other interested parties, we believe that at this stage the priority must be to ensure an immediate halt to Israel's military operations and a full cessation of hostilities, to agree on a sustainable ceasefire and to open the border crossings to Gaza so as to end the blockades.

In parallel, we should also do all that we can to address the pressing humanitarian and economic needs of the people in Gaza. This is an equally urgent need, as the people in Gaza are faced with grave shortages of food, fuel and medical supplies. Turkey, for its part, has already stepped up its efforts in that direction, but more should be done. Israel must be cooperative in allowing unhindered access for humanitarian assistance and in reopening all border crossings.

In addition to those two most urgent steps, the achievement of unity among the Palestinians is also of paramount importance in this course of action. Without such unity, it will be very difficult for the Palestinians to achieve their goal of an independent, peaceful and prosperous future.

Finally, Israelis and Palestinians should be brought back to the negotiation table and encouraged to work toward a comprehensive and lasting peace on the basis of the principles set out by the Quartet and the Annapolis Joint Understanding and the Arab Peace Initiative. After all, only through a meaningful and effective dialogue can we achieve our ultimate objective of comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

These, we believe, are the elements of a course of action that needs to be urgently put into effect for the cessation of hostilities and return to normalcy. Within this framework we can, and maybe should, also consider deploying an international monitoring mission to the region. In light of the publicly expressed views of the parties to the conflict, it is our understanding that the acceptability and viability of a ceasefire, as well as a sustainable end to the blockade, depend on an international commitment to guarantee it.

The international community must act, and must do so quickly and with clear ends in mind. The risks of inaction are enormous and are getting bigger every day. Turkey, for its part, will continue its endeavours to help restore calm in the region so as to open the way for full-fledged efforts for a lasting and comprehensive peace. We believe that the Security Council should also

play its due role in this regard and live up to its responsibilities under the United Nations Charter by helping to bring this crisis to an end.

The President (*spoke in French*): I next invite the Secretary of State of the United States of America, Her Excellency Ms. Condoleezza Rice, to take the floor.

Ms. Rice (United States of America): I wish to thank President Abbas for his presence here, and also the Ministers from the Arab League States who have joined us.

The United States is, of course, deeply concerned about the situation in Gaza, which is clearly worsening. We have been working around the clock to try to end the violence there. The ongoing attacks against Israel and the decision by Hamas not to respect the previous period of calm show us that when this ends there must be new arrangements in place, not a return to the status quo ante. It is imperative that any ceasefire be durable and sustainable and that it ensure the safety and security of Israelis and Palestinians alike.

The situation before the current events in Gaza was clearly not sustainable. Hundreds of thousands of Israelis lived under the daily threat of rocket attacks. Frankly, no country — none of our countries — would have been willing to tolerate such a circumstance. Moreover, the people of Gaza watched as insecurity and lawlessness increased and as their living conditions grew more dire because of the actions of Hamas, which began with the illegal coup against the Palestinian Authority in Gaza. A ceasefire that returns to those circumstances is unacceptable, and it will not last.

We need urgently to conclude a ceasefire that can endure and bring real security. That will begin a period of true calm that includes an end to rocket, mortar and other attacks on Israelis and allows for the cessation of Israel's military offensive. It must also include an end to the smuggling into Gaza and a reopening of crossings so that Palestinians can benefit from humanitarian goods and basic supplies. The November 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access provides a basis for reopening those crossings. We must find a way, with the consent and full cooperation of like-minded Governments, to prevent any arms or explosives from entering Gaza, and the reopening of the tunnel systems that have allowed rearmament of Hamas must be prevented.

Our goal must be the stabilization and normalization of life in Gaza. That will require a principled resolution of the political challenges in Gaza that ultimately re-establishes the Palestinian Authority's legitimate control and facilitates the normal operation of all crossings. The November 26 Arab League statement will serve as an important guide in these efforts, efforts that are led by Egypt.

The international community should adopt an intensive reconstruction initiative, perhaps through a donors conference, that would complement the efforts of the Palestinian Authority in Gaza, because the Palestinian Authority actually devotes 58 per cent of its budget to Gaza. There should be an effort to reconstruct Gaza.

As we strive for a ceasefire, the United States remains deeply concerned about innocent Palestinians and Israelis who are suffering. Let me assure the Council that we understand the urgency of an end to the fighting and that we are working around the clock to bring it into being. In that regard, we are pleased by and wish to commend the statement of the President of Egypt, and we wish to follow up on that initiative.

But we also are very concerned about the humanitarian situation in Gaza. From American partners on the ground I have had detailed reports about the difficult circumstances in Gaza. I have discussed them in detail with Prime Minister Olmert and Foreign Minister Livni. The Prime Minister has informed me that as of tomorrow Israel will open a humanitarian corridor so that there can be some relief for the people of Gaza. That is something we will follow up on, but we will also help you, Mr. Secretary-General, to follow up on that through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), because the problem, as I understand it, is that even if goods get into Gaza it is not possible to distribute them there. The United States will work actively to relieve that circumstance. Moreover, the United States — which has already provided $85 million for humanitarian work in Gaza in the last year — will contribute more emergency aid, if that is needed.

We very much need to find a solution to this problem in the short term. But this time it really must be a solution that does not allow Hamas to use Gaza as a launching pad against Israeli cities. It has to be a solution that does not allow the rearmament of Hamas,

and it must find the way to open crossings so that Palestinians in Gaza can have a normal life.

Just three weeks ago we sat in this Chamber to vote on resolution 1850 (2008). It described the principles to chart a better future for Israelis and Palestinians alike. Resolution 1850 (2008) noted that lasting peace can only be based on an enduring commitment to mutual recognition, freedom from violence, incitement and terror, and the two-State solution, building on previous agreements and obligations.

I think the members of this Council know that President Bush and I personally have been very dedicated to that goal. We remain dedicated to that goal, and the United States of America will remain dedicated to that goal, because we know that the time has long since come when Palestinians, who deserve to live in their own State, should get that State, and when Israelis, who will live in peace and security when they have a peaceful neighbour, should have that peace and security.

I do not mean in any way to diminish the dangers, the urgency, the challenges of this moment in Gaza. This is a crisis that we must resolve, and resolve urgently. But we must also stay focused on creating the conditions that will ultimately lead to a real peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor now to the Secretary of the General People's Committee for Foreign Liaison and International Cooperation of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, His Excellency Mr. Abdurrahman Mohamed Shalgham.

Mr. Shalgham (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): On 27 December 2008, the Israelis launched their destructive aggression, making use a wide variety of the most lethal weapons against defenceless people, having previously besieged and starved them and having deprived them even of water, medicine and other necessities — acts which met with astonishing silence from the Security Council. The Israelis claim to have carried out these actions in response to the firing of rockets from the Gaza Strip, which, according to them, was a violation of the truce agreed upon in June 2008.

Here, we must stop for a moment and consider the facts. Members know that the Gaza Strip has been under siege since the middle of 2007. Under Egyptian auspices, the Israelis and the Palestinians reached a Gaza truce in June 2008. Both parties undertook to cease all forms of violence, and, for its part, the Israeli side committed itself to lifting the blockade, opening the border crossings and returning to the situation that had existed prior to June 2007. This agreed lull was intended to put an end to aggression and fighting for a period during which the two parties concerned would observe the ceasefire as a stage on the way towards a just and final settlement of the Palestinian issue.

But from the very first days of the ceasefire, the Israelis, through their Prime Minister, have adopted a highly negative position. They have preferred to employ force, escalation and aggression at the expense of lasting peace. Israel has essentially not been a party to the ceasefire, which it unjustifiably violated more than 195 times, martyring 25 individuals.

Israel has not lifted the siege or reopened the crossings. On 4 November 2008 the Israeli army carried out an incursion into the eastern Gaza Strip with no provocation from the Palestinian side; during that incursion six Palestinians were killed. That was a serious violation of the truce. It is only normal that there should be a response. The ceasefire must not be respected by the Palestinians only.

Yet in spite of this, in all that time the Palestinians did not fire a single shot, even though they were entitled to do so because they are under occupation and are entitled to respond to Israeli aggression.

Since 5 November 2008, in full view of the entire world, the Israelis have imposed a complete air, land and sea blockade on Gaza. The United Nations considers that to be a clear violation of international law. The blockade even prevents humanitarian assistance from reaching Gaza: trucks and assistance provided by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) are unable to enter the Gaza Strip. This means that the Agency has had to suspend its distribution of basic goods to those in need. As everybody knows, that means half of the population of Gaza. The result is that they have starved those people.

On 18 December 2008 (see S/PV.6049), my country described the various repercussions of the blockade and the total paralysis of economic activity. Bakeries have closed; 80 per cent of households are living below the poverty line; there are grave water and

sanitation problems — the people of Gaza have water only once a week. Water treatment plants are no longer in operation, which means that stagnant water now lies in the streets of Gaza. There is virtually a complete lack of medicine. The Council has heard from numerous United Nations agencies that 150 essential medicines are not to be found. Many people have died for lack of medicine and because they are being prevented from seeking treatment outside Gaza.

The electric power plant that provided more than half of Gaza's electricity is basically shut down. Banks are no longer operating and are on the verge of collapse. The World Bank has drawn attention to this issue, because the Israelis have prevented Bank funds from entering the Gaza Strip.

The multifaceted fallout from the blockade is well known.

All of this has been done in the full view of the Security Council and in spite of numerous appeals and warnings from officials of United Nations agencies. The Council has failed to take action.

The underlying causes and principal reasons for this situation are the occupation, the denial to Palestinians of their rights and the immoral and illegal practices of the Israelis.

The Israeli authorities are occupation authorities; they have clear obligations under international law, in particular under the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. Obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention include provision of security, food and medical services and the facilitation of emergency services. But the Israeli authorities have nonetheless violated all of their obligations and have imposed collective punishment. They have perpetrated extremely grave crimes, as everyone knows. All of this has taken place after the international community's unanimous declaration on genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

In spite of that, the Council has failed to take action. The fact that the Council has taken no action has encouraged the Israeli authorities in their actions since 27 December 2008. Air raids, employing cutting-edge weaponry, have been stepped up. There we see the origins of the crimes of genocide and crimes against humanity.

Through their Minister of Defence and other officials, the Israeli authorities continue to state that these crimes are only the beginning, and that Israel will continue and expand its aggression. Israel will continue the blockade, which is starving Palestinians. Israel has rejected humanitarian appeals for a 24-hour lull to make it possible to deliver humanitarian assistance.

Now there has been a very serious escalation: the ground attack that began on Saturday, 3 January 2009. The result, we fear, has been a major surge in deaths and injuries. There has been destruction, even of UNRWA schools — even though Karen AbuZayd, Commissioner-General of UNRWA, has said that the Palestinian resistance is not using the Agency's infrastructure, facilities or schools as human shields.

In spite of the Security Council's urgent consultations on 3 January 2009, no common position has been adopted, not even a statement to the press.

The Israelis have once again demonstrated that they are not interested in peace. What they are interested in is new territory. They are perpetrating terrorism against the Palestinians and are using every means available to them. They are starving, arresting and killing Palestinians on a mass scale. The aim of what the Israelis are methodically doing is clear. The means they use are also clear, What the Israelis continue to do is to perpetrate the greatest violence in the history of the Israeli occupation. That is Israel's response to resolution 1850 (2008) of 16 December 2008.

The vacillation of the Council and its hesitation on taking a decision and adopting a resolution have permitted the Israeli war machine to continue to perpetrate the worst of horrors against a defenceless people and to ignore international law. The Council is now repeating what it did in 2006, when it gave Israel the leeway to keep killing Lebanese civilians and to destroy Lebanon's basic infrastructure in order to achieve the aims of certain parties.

The fact is that the massacre perpetrated by Israel in Gaza continues and has claimed the lives of some 600 Palestinians, more than a fourth of them babies, women and children and 80 per cent of them civilians. In addition, 2,800 have been wounded, 20 per cent of whom are in critical condition; mosques, homes, schools and official buildings have been destroyed. The deterioration in the humanitarian situation that we are seeing today is astonishing. A school was targeted

today and dozens were killed; the school was not a bunker. The Council should ensure that the criminals responsible do not escape punishment.

My delegation has submitted a draft resolution to the Council. We have made several changes to take the concerns of various members into account. We hope that the Council will adopt the draft resolution. Every minute that passes means more suffering, destruction, killing, hatred and desire for vengeance. Any delay would send the wrong message to the aggressor, who would continue with its aggression and crimes.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Michael Spindelegger, Federal Minister for European and International Affairs of Austria.

Mr. Spindelegger (Austria): As this is the first time that Austria is taking part in a formal meeting of the Council as one of the new non-permanent members, let me begin by saying that it is an honour for my country to serve the interests of peace and international security in this capacity. During the two years to come, Austria will strive to exercise this important responsibility in the interest of the entire membership of the United Nations.

I should like to thank Foreign Minister Kouchner for taking this very timely initiative. You, Sir, can count on Austria's full support and active cooperation in all your efforts to end the bloodshed in Gaza and southern Israel.

We greatly appreciate the presence of the Secretary-General. Austria has taken good note of his appeal to the Security Council and of his intention to travel to the region soon. He has our full support.

The importance of today's meeting is also highlighted by the presence of so many foreign ministers around the table and in the Chamber. More specifically, I wish to acknowledge the presence of President Mahmoud Abbas, who has just had to leave. I listened very carefully to his statement, as well as to that of the Ambassador of Israel.

For many years, Austria has maintained close and friendly relations with all the countries of the Middle East. We are therefore extremely concerned about the serious further deterioration of the situation in and around Gaza.

Austria deeply regrets that calls by the Security Council, the Middle East Quartet, the European Union and others for an end to the violence have gone unheeded. We also regret that the Security Council was unable to formally agree on a call for an immediate, permanent and fully respected ceasefire during its emergency meeting on Saturday.

In the meantime, the European Union and France, as well as other members of the Council, have reinforced their efforts to help resolve the crisis. Nonetheless, hostilities have so far continued unabated, with an ever-increasing number of civilian victims.

Austria has repeatedly condemned the rocket attacks by Hamas from Gaza on Israel. We respect the right of Israel to safeguard the security of its citizens, but we also believe that the military operations under way are clearly disproportionate and continue to inflict an unacceptable toll on Palestinian civilians. We therefore call on both sides to adhere to an immediate and permanent ceasefire, which needs to be effectively monitored. There must be an unconditional halt to rocket attacks by Hamas on Israel and an end to Israeli military action.

Austria remains greatly concerned about the ever more desperate humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip and its effects on the civilian population. We therefore call on all parties to take all necessary measures to alleviate the serious humanitarian situation on the ground and to ensure the continuous provision of humanitarian supplies to Gaza, including through a lasting and normal opening of all border crossings. An effective end to the smuggling of arms and ammunition into the Gaza Strip is an indispensable prerequisite in that regard. Moreover, we also call upon all parties to strictly observe the rules of humanitarian and human rights law.

If violence is not brought to an end, a resumption of the diplomatic process towards a political solution will become more and more difficult. The hostilities have gravely disrupted the various channels of communication that had been successfully established during recent months. Continuing violence will have a lasting negative effect, not only on the follow-up to Annapolis but also on other developments towards comprehensive regional peace, in particular along the Israeli-Syrian track. Against that backdrop, Austria welcomes the most recent diplomatic initiative in the region, in particular the important statement made

today by President Mubarak and the contacts undertaken by President Sarkozy.

The Security Council must remain actively engaged in encouraging and supporting all efforts to end the conflict and to bring about what peoples in the region have been yearning for during decades — the creation of a viable, independent, democratic and sovereign Palestinian State living in peace and security with Israel within recognized international borders.

We continue to believe that the objective of the Security Council must be the rapid resolution of the current crisis based on the following elements: a call for an immediate, permanent and fully respected ceasefire; free access for humanitarian supplies into Gaza, including through the lasting and normal opening of all border crossings; an effective end to the smuggling of arms and ammunition into the Gaza Strip; a call on all parties to fully respect their obligations under humanitarian and human rights law; full support for the regional and diplomatic efforts under way to solve the crisis; and a call on Israelis and Palestinians to continue negotiations for a comprehensive solution as envisaged in resolution 1850 (2008).

I am convinced that that is an outcome that would be in the interest of all parties. Austria will do everything to help you, Mr. President, to move this matter forward along those lines as rapidly as possible.

Mr. Le Luong Minh (Viet Nam): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important and timely meeting of the Security Council and for personally presiding over it. I also wish to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his statement, as well as President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian National Authority and the foreign ministers of Arab countries for their participation. I also thank Ambassador Shalev of Israel for her participation.

My delegation has followed with profound concern the sharply escalating situation in the Gaza Strip over the past few days, which has been taking a lamentable toll in innocent lives and causing widespread destruction to infrastructure and the private property of innocent Palestinians since Israel launched its military operations into Gaza.

We are gravely concerned about the worsening humanitarian crisis faced by Palestinians in Gaza as a result of the ongoing military actions, the continued closure of border crossings, the obstruction of access to humanitarian aid, including food and medicine, and the reduction in fuel and electricity supplies.

Every passing day is another day we see the lives of more innocent Palestinian civilians, many of them women and children, lost or harmed and those of innocent Israelis threatened. We are strongly convinced that all indiscriminate attacks against civilians are unjustifiable under any pretext and that there cannot be a military solution to the current conflict.

My delegation calls upon the parties concerned to exercise the maximum restraint, cease all military activities and acts of violence and return to the negotiating table to resolve outstanding issues by peaceful means. We urge Israel to stop the excessive and disproportionate use of force and its military operations and immediately withdraw its forces from Gaza.

While recalling both parties' mutual obligations to comply with international humanitarian and human rights laws, including the provisions of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, we underline the urgent need to cease all restrictive measures and open border crossings in order to facilitate the delivery of food, medical aid, fuel and other humanitarian supplies to the suffering people in Gaza, the evacuation of the injured and the unhindered access of humanitarian workers.

We pay tribute to the United Nations agencies, in particular the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and other humanitarian organizations for their work under challenging circumstances on the ground.

We call upon the international community to extend further emergency and humanitarian assistance to the civilian population in Gaza.

At this critical juncture, when every opportunity to make peace and bring an immediate end to the current crisis should be treasured, my delegation fully supports the intensified and coordinated efforts of the international community to establish an immediate, permanent, effective and monitored ceasefire between the parties concerned and thus ensure long-term peace, security and stability in the region.

The Security Council, which is mandated to maintain international peace and security, can and

should play its due role in finding a durable solution to this crisis by adopting a resolution that will stop the continued loss of civilian lives, prevent the recurrence or further escalation on the situation and put the peace process back on track. Along these lines, my delegation is prepared to work constructively with other Council members on the draft resolution proposed by Libya on behalf of the League of Arab States with a view to achieving consensus and its early adoption.

Finally, my delegation would like to reaffirm Viet Nam's steadfast support for the peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the realization of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace, within secure and recognized borders, on the basis of the road map, the Arab Peace Initiative, the Annapolis understanding and relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and 1850 (2008).

Mr. Kafando (*spoke in French*): We thank you, Mr. President, for having convened this meeting of the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East, in particular the serious crisis currently taking place in Gaza. We have greatly appreciated the presence here of the President of the Palestinian Authority in this debate. We also welcome the presence of the Secretary-General and of all the ministers and representatives here today.

The unprecedented mobilization of the international community that we are witnessing unquestionably demonstrates the clear awareness that we all have of the seriousness of the situation and of the urgent need to find an appropriate and timely response to it. We are deeply concerned by the ongoing hostilities between Israel and Hamas, which have worsened since Israel launched military ground operations in Gaza on 3 January.

Whatever can be said in terms of the responsibilities of the various parties, we must acknowledge that recourse to force, whoever undertakes it and in whatever way it is used, cannot be the appropriate solution to any conflict, much less the current crisis. Quite the contrary, it has no other effect than to further worsen tensions. We are particularly distressed by the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Gaza, which was already of great concern. As hostages to the situation, the civilian population is paying a very heavy toll for those confrontations.

This is why my delegation calls for an immediate ceasefire, with a reliable monitoring mechanism, the opening of crossings to allow for humanitarian access, the rejection of the military option and the re-launching of a political process that is credible and carried out in good faith.

The urgency of the situation requires effective and rapid action by the Security Council. Everyone has acknowledged this. The Council owes as much to the Palestinian people, in particular the people in Gaza, who are under embargo and whose untold suffering challenges our conscience as human beings. It owes it to the Israeli people who have been victims of Hamas rocket attacks. It owes it to stability in the region and to international peace and security.

We would like to commend the many and varied initiatives under way to bring about a settlement to the crisis. No effort or expression of goodwill is or will be superfluous in terms of contributing to putting an end to the tragedy unfolding before us.

The results that we hope to achieve in the short term must be followed up and sustained by a firm commitment by all parties to undertake a search for the ways and means to bring about a lasting solution. To that end, we need to take into account the important gains already achieved on the path to peace, in particular the Arab Peace Initiative, the Quartet road map and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

But it is, above all, up to the parties themselves to demonstrate greater political will, which requires that they fully comply with their commitments. The parties need to establish the minimum conditions for trust that will be necessary for building a solid and lasting basis for peace. In particular, we urge Israel to put an end to the settlements and the blockade of Gaza. At the same time, we call upon Hamas to end the rocket and mortar attacks against Israeli territories.

Clearly, the settlement of the crisis in the Middle East, including the current crisis, is a collective and shared responsibility. The direct actors in the international community need to play their respective parts. We reiterate our full support for all negotiating efforts under way currently, particularly the most recent efforts undertaken by President Mubarak and President Sarkozy to bring about a rapid ceasefire and the restoration of calm.

For its part, the Security Council needs to take action, and take it quickly, not only to help to put an end to the human and humanitarian tragedy under way, but also to avoid others in the future. We are prepared, along with all the other members of the Council, to provide our modest contribution to this.

Mr. Ballestero (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation is pleased to see you here in New York, Mr. President, to preside over this meeting. We also welcome the presence of President Abbas, the Secretary-General, Secretary of State Rice, the various ministers and deputy ministers for foreign affairs and the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States.

My country has been a member of the Security Council for the past 12 months. Throughout that period, we have tried to give meaning to our presence here by promoting the observance of international law in the Middle East, the fulfilment of the commitments of the parties and the implementation of the resolutions of the Security Council. During the entire time, we have also called for the Council to take significant steps to alleviate tensions and strengthen the peace process. We have called for the Council to play a significant role in what we feel to be one of the most serious threats to international peace and security.

We have not been as successful in that goal as we had hoped. In recent weeks, the members of this Council unanimously agreed on what became resolution 1850 (2008), the first resolution on this topic since 2004, which broke the silence of this Council. That resolution, as Secretary of State Rice said at the time, aimed to describe "the contours of the negotiations" and to define "the role of the international community, which will prevent a return to violence and hopelessness". I repeat: "which will prevent a return to violence and hopelessness" (*S/PV.6045, p. 3*). For Russian Minister Lavrov, the resolution's aim was "to strengthen the continuity and irreversibility of the political process ... and give that approach the strength of international law" (ibid., *p. 5*). Today, the situation on the ground demonstrates that resolution 1850 (2008) was not enough to achieve those lofty aims.

Subsequently, the beginning of the Israeli military offensive generated a press statement that expressed shared concern at the escalating violence, terrorist acts, the fate of the civilian population and the terrifying humanitarian situation in Gaza. In it, the members of the Council expressed the need to reopen the way to finding a political solution to the Middle East issue. We hoped that those statements of the Council would prevent the serious situation that we are experiencing and regretting today. Unfortunately, the situation has shown that we were wrong and that it was not enough.

Today's meeting should not be a mere declaration of good intentions. Little more than three weeks ago, Minister Miliband said here that "the perils of inertia are clear; inactivity and confrontation are the recruiting sergeants for extremism" (ibid., *p. 6*). The political process and the situation on the ground are inseparable, and it is therefore necessary for this Council to demand an immediate end to all military action, using all the instruments and powers stipulated in the Charter of the United Nations.

In this Chamber, there are voices defending the errors of all the parties. For that reason, as we already said some months ago, this Council can be part of the problem and not part of the solution to the crisis in Middle East. It is important to shake off our inertia by moving away from the eye-for-an-eye approach, which only leads to the blindness of all, and by adopting a courageous position that can create an environment conducive to negotiations.

Costa Rica echoed the words of the French delegation when, in this very Chamber on 16 December, Ambassador Ripert stated "the absolute need for respect for humanitarian law" which "unreservedly prohibits terrorist acts that blindly strike civilian populations" and "also prohibits any form of collective punishment" (ibid., *p. 9*). His delegation called upon the members of the Council not to forget that those rules must provide guidance in addressing the situation in Gaza. Costa Rica supports his words.

Costa Rica is ready to contribute to the adoption of a draft resolution that urgently calls for an immediate cessation of the hostilities, the establishment of an effective and lasting truce and the opening of all border crossings with controls and guarantees accepted and respected by all, so as to allow a return to the path of negotiations that will ultimately lead to the establishment of a viable and democratic Palestinian State, living side by side with Israel and jointly promoting the well-being and development that their peoples deserve and desire.

The President (*spoke in French*): I call on the representative of Croatia.

Mr. Jurica (Croatia): I, too, would like to thank you, Sir, for convening and presiding over this very important meeting of the Security Council. I would like to begin by welcoming Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, the President of the Palestinian National Authority His Excellency Mahmoud Abbas, Secretary-General of the Arab League Amre Moussa, and all the ministers present here today.

Croatia shares the sense of extreme urgency that has brought us together. I would like to convey my Government's deepest concerns at the suffering of civilians in and around Gaza and to reiterate the need to end all violence. We continue to appeal to the parties to exercise maximum restraint, to adhere to the tenets of international humanitarian law and to avoid civilian casualties. We reiterate the call for unhindered access to humanitarian assistance and supplies.

We understand that, in order to avoid an escalation of violence and the further deterioration of the humanitarian and security conditions on the ground, it is essential to achieve an immediate and permanent ceasefire that will be respected by all, put a stop to the persistent rocket attacks targeting southern Israel and end the suffering and deprivation in Gaza.

We are deeply disturbed by the latest reports of military movements into Gaza. We also understand that the Israeli military operations are not aimed at the Palestinian population, but should be seen in the context of the continuing threat coming from Hamas, which denies Israel's right to exist and has intensified the scope and frequency of its attacks on the population of southern Israel. Israel has an inherent and legitimate right to defend itself and the obligation to defend and protect its citizens. However, it is vital that civilians in Gaza be protected.

Our previous discussions have demonstrated that we all share the conviction that an effective, permanent and credible ceasefire is needed if we want to secure permanent peace and lasting improvement in the humanitarian, social and economic conditions in Gaza. We appreciate the new initiative presented to us today, which aims to secure the adoption of a Security Council resolution on that matter. It is a timely call, and my delegation is ready to work with others in bringing that forward.

In the interests of a durable and credible ceasefire, it is important that such steps not amount to returning to the status quo. Only if the conditions on the ground are such that they can guarantee a ceasefire that will be fully respected by both sides, that Israel can be assured that its population will not be exposed to the continuing terror of rocket attacks and that the smuggling of weapons by Hamas will not be tolerated can we hope to reach a sustainable solution to the crisis.

In the interests of a lasting state of calm, it is imperative that there be confidence in the mechanisms on the ground. While reiterating the call on all parties to adhere to an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire, we should not forget that the political dialogue and diplomatic efforts mean that Hamas must recognize Israel and its right to exist, abide by the commitments of the Palestine Liberation Organization and, in particular, cease the terror of daily rocket attacks that threaten the population of southern Israel.

Croatia continues to believe that a political dialogue is the only way to achieve a lasting peace based on the two-State solution. Resolution 1850 (2008), which was adopted only three weeks ago, charts the way forward. We find it essential that the Council remain guided by the objectives reaffirmed by resolution 1850 (2008) in our efforts to find a solution to this unfolding crisis.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Japan.

Mr. Takasu (Japan): I would like to thank the French presidency for organizing today's extremely important meeting on the serious situation in and around Gaza. Since this is my first formal statement to the Council during the new term, I pledge on this occasion Japan's commitment to promoting global peace and security through the efficient and effective work of the Council.

Japan is deeply grateful to the Secretary-General for his statement today, which is extremely useful in addressing the serious security and humanitarian situation on the ground and for guiding our course of action. The participation of President Abbas, Secretary-General Amre Moussa of the League of Arab States and so many ministerial representatives in today's meeting clearly demonstrates the gravity and urgency of the issue at hand.

Japan is deeply concerned about the deteriorating situation in and around the Gaza Strip. We are particularly concerned that Israeli ground troops

operations are continuing in the Gaza Strip, despite urgent calls from the international community for a ceasefire. It is regrettable that there are so many Palestinian civilian casualties every day. At the same time, Japan deplores the rocket attacks against Israel from the Gaza Strip that preceded current events and are still continuing, causing serious harm to civilian life in southern Israel.

We must make every effort urgently to achieve an effective ceasefire to give assurance of calm in the area. A ceasefire can be effective only when it is immediate, permanent and fully respected. The cycle of violence must come to an end and further increases in civilian casualties must be prevented. To that end, Japan calls on Israel to exercise the utmost self-restraint. Foreign Minister Nakasone has spoken with Foreign Minister Livni, and Prime Minister Aso spoke with Prime Minister Olmert, calling for an immediate ceasefire. At the same time, Japan strongly calls on Palestinian militants and Hamas to stop attacks from the Gaza Strip against Israel.

Japan appreciates and strongly supports the regional and international intermediary efforts by concerned countries to achieve the immediate cessation of violence — most notably, the efforts on the part of President Mubarak of Egypt, the Prime Minister of Turkey, President Sarkozy of France and other political leaders, including those of the European Union, the United States and Russia. We also appreciate the efforts of the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy and representatives. We very much hope that these efforts will bear fruit very soon.

We also need to address urgently the dire humanitarian situation. Japan sympathizes deeply with the innocent civilians who are suffering in Gaza. Prime Minister Aso requested Prime Minister Olmert to take necessary measures to allow humanitarian supplies into Gaza. On 3 January, Prime Minister Aso called President Abbas to express his full support for the President and to convey Japan's condolences to the Palestinian victims. We support Palestinian unity under the leadership of President Abbas.

The people in Gaza require immediate humanitarian assistance, and Japan will provide $10 million in aid, of which $3 million will be provided immediately through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. All necessary humanitarian and economic aid should be allowed to go unhindered through the crossings. The crossings into Gaza need to be reopened, under legitimate control, in order to allow necessary supplies to reach the population in need and to provide medical treatment for the injured. In opening the crossings, we are concerned about the smuggling of arms into Gaza, which undermines the safety of crossings as well as the security of both Palestinian and Israeli civilians. Effective measures need to be taken to prevent such illegal smuggling of weapons.

Japan believes that it is important for the Security Council to address these serious issues and forge a unified voice urgently. Japan is committed to playing a constructive role in resolving the situation speedily.

Peace and stability will be attained not through violence, but through political and diplomatic means. We fully support the principles laid out in Security Council resolution 1850 (2008). A lasting peace will only be achieved through an enduring commitment to mutual recognition, freedom from violence, incitement and terror, and the two-State solution, building upon previous agreements and obligations. We must continue to encourage the moderate forces that seek peace.

Japan, along with others in the international community, stands ready to support the parties in their efforts to achieve peace. We sincerely hope that the political process will soon again be on track to realize a comprehensive, just and lasting peace.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Mexico.

Mr. Heller (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): Upon assuming its responsibilities as a member of the Security Council, Mexico would like to express its profound concern at the violence unleashed in recent days in the Gaza Strip, which has resulted in numerous victims among the Palestinian civilian population.

Mexico condemns the excessive use of force, represented by the bombardment and subsequent land operations carried out by the Israeli army in Gaza, which has now been going on for 11 days. We also condemn the launching of rockets into Israeli territory from the Gaza Strip, which has also claimed victims among the civilian population. It is necessary to break the vicious cycle of violence that, far from improving security in the region and solving the root causes of the

conflict, will only contribute to a situation of increased uncertainty and fear.

Echoing the press statement issued by the Security Council on 28 December 2008, Mexico calls for the cessation of hostilities and of all military activity in order to address the humanitarian crisis on the ground, including by opening border crossings to ensure the provision of humanitarian supplies — food, fuel and medicines — as well as to generate the minimal necessary conditions to boost peace talks in the region.

Of particular interest to Mexico is that the parties should recognize that it is imperative to respect the provisions of international humanitarian law, especially those contained in the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. Mexico therefore urgently calls for the granting of access to international organizations and humanitarian aid in order to avoid further loss of human life and to guarantee the security of the civilian population, as various agencies of the United Nations have already demanded.

Peace in the Middle East, including the resolution of the Palestinian question, depends on the implementation of relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), which would lay the foundations for a peaceful and definitive solution to the conflict. The search for a comprehensive and long-term solution to the Middle East conflict is not conducted through the use of arms. Rather, that solution is linked to a political approach based on constructive dialogue, in accordance with international law and the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

Resolution 1850 (2008), which the Security Council adopted on 16 December, clearly establishes that a lasting peace can only be based on an enduring commitment to mutual recognition, freedom from violence, incitement and terror, as well as on bilateral negotiations, building on previous agreements and obligations.

From the 1991 Madrid Conference and the Oslo process to the most recent efforts made through the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative and the Annapolis Conference, the imperative need to build a region in which two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, can live side by side in peace and within secure and recognized borders has become increasingly obvious. Mexico supports the efforts of the Secretary-General and the Quartet to seek an immediate cessation of military activities and to address the humanitarian crisis, as well as the essential efforts of all those neighbouring States that are genuinely interested in contributing to a lasting and mutually acceptable solution.

All States have the right to protect their security and, even more, the obligation to guarantee it for the benefit of their citizens. In their actions, however, they must comply with international humanitarian law, witnout which civilized coexistence is impossible. Likewise, all terrorist activities, which run counter to the achievement of a political solution that guarantees respect for the right of peoples to a stable and lasting peace, must be stopped. In that context, it is essential to put an end to illegal trafficking in weapons and military equipment, and to all activities that promote terrorism.

The Security Council must contribute decisively to finding a solution to the conflict, support the peace process and build confidence in the quest for a political solution. The credibility and effectiveness of the Security Council in shouldering its responsibility to promote international peace and security depend on that. The Council must constructively propose guidelines that will help to create a more favourable atmosphere for negotiations and a just and lasting peace process, not just react to immediate events.

Finally, Mexico believes that, given the continued deterioration of the situation on the ground, including the Israeli bombing of a United Nations school today, the efforts of the international community — including the initiative announced today by President Mubarak of Egypt — must come together in an operational resolution aimed at finding a solution to the conflict in all its aspects. That will require that the Security Council define and establish a monitoring mechanism that guarantees observance of the ceasefire by the parties, as well as other commitments to be undertaken in various areas referred to during this debate, in order to create an environment conducive to achieving a lasting peace in the region. Mexico is willing to support a Security Council resolution containing those elements.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on the representative of Uganda.

Mr. Butagira (Uganda): Uganda is pleased to see you, Mr. Minister, chairing this important meeting. I wish to thank you for organizing this meeting, given the situation in the Middle East.

At the outset, I wish to acknowledge the presence in our midst today of His Excellency President Mahmoud Abbas and the Foreign Ministers of various countries. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

Uganda has followed with deep concern the escalation of violence in the region. This has had a disastrous impact on the civilian population, with many lives lost and livelihoods disrupted. The humanitarian tragedy is shameful and must be put to an end. The violence further complicates efforts to reach a negotiated and peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, even more so after the Council, a few weeks ago, unanimously adopted resolution 1850 (2008).

Much as we are appalled by the ongoing violence and counter-violence, I do not think that we will do justice if we do not also address what was the immediate cause of this escalation. So, we must not keep silent on the issue of rockets being fired at Israel, injuring civilians. At the same time, we must not turn a blind eye to what Israel's response has been in relation to the unfolding tragedy. In other words, we should be balanced and look at the picture in toto.

That said, the escalation is a reminder that the international community, and the Council in particular, should remain firmly engaged, working with the parties to achieve a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. That will be achieved only through negotiations between the parties with the support of the international community. It is for that reason that Uganda welcomes this meeting, as it serves as a reminder to the Palestinians, the Israelis and the international community of our obligation to support peace. To that end, we call for and support intra-Palestinian reconciliation, national dialogue and unity.

Given the current escalation, the first priority is an immediate end to the violence. My delegation has called for an immediate and permanent ceasefire whose implementation must be monitored to ensure full compliance. Uganda would like to express its support for those who have called for a ceasefire that is durable and sustainable. The Council would be engaged in a futile exercise if we called for a ceasefire only to return to the situation that prevailed earlier. In other words, the ceasefire must not be abused by those who might wish to cause violence. Thus, it must be sustainable and durable and must be monitored effectively.

Secondly, there is an urgent need for access to Gaza for humanitarian assistance. The ceasefire will facilitate that, but the border crossings should also be opened in order to improve the humanitarian situation.

Uganda will continue to support all efforts aimed at reducing tension and achieving a comprehensive peace in the Middle East, consistent with the relevant United Nations resolutions. We commend all those countries and organizations, particularly the Arab League, that have worked tirelessly in recent days in pursuit of that goal.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on the representative of China.

Mr. Zhang Yesui (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): At the outset, I wish to thank His Excellency Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his briefing. We welcome the presence at today's meeting of His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian National Authority; Mr. Amre Moussa, Secretary General of the League of Arab States; and the Foreign Ministers of a number of Arab countries.

China is greatly concerned at the heavy casualties and the loss of property caused by the most recent outbreak of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and is deeply worried about the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza. The top priority now is for the parties concerned to achieve an immediate ceasefire to avoid further civilian casualties. We urge Israel to halt its military operation immediately and open all the border crossings in Gaza to ensure unfettered access of humanitarian supplies to the area. The armed Palestinian faction also needs to stop its rocket firings. We urge the international community to provide further assistance to ease the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

The Security Council, which shoulders the primary responsibility for maintaining world peace and security, has every reason to play an active role. Regrettably, however, the three emergency meetings held by the Council since the outbreak of the conflict have achieved no result. We hope the Council will respond to the will of the international community and the appeal of Arab States and take swift actions to adopt a resolution so as to send a positive and clear

signal to the parties concerned and push for an immediate ceasefire.

China always opposes the use of force in settling disputes and condemns all violent activities against civilians. What has happened over the past 60 years shows that military means are not a way out of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The cycle of violence does no good to either side and cannot bring about security for any party. We hope that the parties concerned will exercise maximum restraint, exhibit courage and wisdom and continue to resolve their differences through dialogue.

We call on the international community to make vigorous efforts for the peace process, push for a just and equitable settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian issue and work towards real and enduring peace in the area.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now invite the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, His Excellency Mr. Alexander Yakovenko.

Mr. Yakovenko (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I am pleased to greet you, Mr. Minister, in the President's chair. We have listened to your statement with great interest, and also to the assessments put forward by the Secretary-General, by President Abbas and by the various ministers.

The Russian Federation is deeply concerned by the serious escalation of the crisis in Gaza since the beginning of the Israeli ground operation. These current tragic developments are fraught with potential for further destabilization of the situation in the Palestinian territories and in the Middle East in general. The information coming in through the United Nations channels attests to the many civilian victims. The situation in Gaza has become a humanitarian disaster.

Humanitarian deliveries and evacuations of the wounded in Gaza must be allowed to ease the situation in that sector. The civilian population's safety cannot be ensured while there are widespread military operations under way in Gaza. If this is not ended in the near term, then the number of victims will be much greater. In this alarming situation, Russia sent humanitarian assistance on 2 January through Egypt to the population of Gaza. We are preparing a second delivery. An air-mobile hospital from the Russian Ministry of Emergency Situations will also be deployed in the conflict zone.

Today, the views put forward repeatedly by the Council and the international community are more relevant than ever in determining an end to the situation. There needs to be a guarantee here that there will be no resumption of violence. We are certain that tanks and aircraft, just like rocket attacks, will not resolve any of the challenges facing the region. The advancement of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the region is possible only via a peace dialogue and implementation by the parties of all relevant international obligations.

It is particularly concerning that the dramatic situation in the Gaza area began when there were increased international efforts for an Arab-Israeli settlement. Essentially, preparations were under way for convening the Moscow meeting. It is necessary to ensure that these efforts will be successful. But for that to happen, we need above all to address the Gaza crisis through political means. In this regard, we have been interested in the peace initiative advanced by President Mubarak of Egypt and President Sarkozy of France. The steps needed for a peaceful settlement to the crisis in Gaza are being pursued actively by the Russian leadership, which has been in intensive contact with all Middle East and international parties without exception. The end to this crisis is dependent upon them.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now invite His Royal Highness Prince Saud Al-Faisal, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia, to take the floor.

Prince Al-Faisal (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): We meet today as the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip continue to suffer hugely from a savage aggression that is unrelenting and unforgiving at the hand of the Israeli war machine. It has led to the deaths of hundreds and wounded thousands, including children, women and the elderly. It has caused terrific destruction to property and infrastructure.

It is a wide human catastrophe that has beset Gaza: overall death and destruction. Israel has turned its munitions falling from the sky into an unbearable hell on the ground, using every conceivable weapon of destruction invented by the human mind to scourge by fire an unarmed people besieged from the air, the land and the sea. The destruction and killing during the aerial bombardment seem insufficient to slake the Israelis' thirst or indeed to convince the Security Council to move swiftly and immediately to prevent

the further escalation expected in such grave circumstances.

The call for the convening of this meeting proceeds from our appreciation of what is expected from the Security Council in such circumstances, as provided by the Charter of the United Nations. The Security Council is the body entrusted with the maintenance of international peace and security. Although the provisions of the Charter state that when a certain conflict leads to fighting as soon as possible, it seems that the Security Council has set that role aside this time. The Israeli aggression against Gaza has continued for more than 11 days now. This places a big question mark over the credibility of the Security Council and the entire system of international peace and security.

What we find astonishing and surprising is the deafening silence in the face of the attack on Gaza. Indeed, some claim that the operation is nothing more than Israel exercising its right to self-defence. While following, for example, the armed conflict in Georgia, we saw the international community move most urgently and effectively and mobilize all measures necessary to contain the situation, end the conflict and ensure a withdrawal of forces. Palestinian blood continues to be shed. Destruction is spreading in a way that cannot be justified in any way whatsoever.

War no longer evokes glory and pride, only rage and condemnation on the part of the international community. What is happening in Gaza now can only be described as a horrendous humanitarian crime that will only lead to more violence and extremism and put the goal of peace and security, which Israel uses to justify its acts of aggression, further out of reach.

Israel's security can be achieved only by the establishment of a just peace that responds to the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. Those rights have been recognized in instruments of international legitimacy, including Security Council resolutions. They have also been affirmed by the Geneva Conventions and enshrined in every agreement and initiative put forth to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including the Arab Peace Initiative.

Israel bears full responsibility for the grave situation and the ferocious siege on the Palestinian people and the closure of crossing points. Israel violated the truce agreed by the two parties in June 2008, in return for a ceasefire and an understanding that the crossing points would be opened and the siege lifted. The Palestinian side fulfilled its obligations under the agreement, whereas Israel maintained its stranglehold on 1.5 million Palestinians in Gaza — an immoral act and humanitarian tragedy to which the international community failed to respond.

In referring to that painful reality, our goal is not to engage in unproductive arguments; rather, it is to describe the situation as it is and to prompt us to work seriously towards a ceasefire that will end the armed conflict that is causing death and destruction in Gaza as we speak. There is no way out of this crisis but through a clear and explicit resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire and the lifting of the siege.

The members of the League of Arab States have today presented the Security Council with the resolution adopted by the extraordinary meeting of the League's foreign ministers held in Cairo on 31 December 2008. That document formulates a vision for a resolution to the crisis on the basis of an immediate halt to all military action in Gaza, the lifting of the siege, the opening of the crossing points and an end to the policy of collective punishment imposed on Palestinians that led to this serious deterioration. The Arab proposal aims both at putting an end to the military operation and at addressing the causes that led to it. Lifting the siege, calming the situation and establishing the necessary monitoring mechanism will ensure a lasting solution. That will serve to meet Israel's security concerns and pave the way for a resumption of the peace process and the revitalization of negotiations to end the occupation and establish an independent, viable Palestinian State. That is the only way to ensure the security of Israel and Palestine, as well as the security and stability of the region.

Arab countries are committed to international law, the principles of international legitimacy and the resolutions of the Security Council. Unfortunately, we are confronted by delays, procrastination and attempts to undermine the peace efforts of Arab countries. Either the Security Council must address our legitimate issues responsibly and seriously on the basis of those principles or we shall be forced to turn our backs and consider other options.

Palestinians are dying at this very moment. Children are being orphaned. Parents are losing loved ones for no reason save for the fact of where they find

themselves. Is the Council going to allow that to continue for even another hour?

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Amre Moussa, Secretary General of the League of Arab States.

Mr. Moussa (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I should like to extend our congratulations to you, Mr. President, on France's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the first month of the new year. France will thereby shoulder its share of responsibility for addressing the grave situation in the Middle East — a historic role that will also resonate in the region. I should also like to express our appreciation for the efforts of French President Sarkozy to urgently and seriously address Israel's grave and indiscriminate acts of aggression against the Gaza Strip without distinction between civilians and non-civilians. I would also like to commend the former President of the Council on his presidency.

As many speakers before me have stated, it has now been 11 days since Israeli occupation forces began the aerial, naval and ground bombardment of the Gaza Strip that has resulted in an extremely tense and dangerous situation. A military occupying force is attacking a territory under its own occupation, blockading it and isolating its population on the pretext that the Palestinian resistance is launching rockets that threaten the security of the inhabitants of southern Israel — as if the people of Gaza were not themselves also endangered by weapon fire.

Today we learned of the bombing of a Palestinian school where Palestinians had taken shelter, and of the resulting dozens of deaths. We also heard the briefing by Mr. Maxwell Gaylard, United Nations humanitarian coordinator for the Palestinian territories, who stated that

(*spoke in English*)

> "People could not reach available food. Children are hungry, cold, without electricity and running water. And above all, they are terrified. That, by any measure, is a humanitarian crisis".

(*spoke in Arabic*)

Can the Security Council remain silent in the face of such a situation?

While reaffirming its well-known position on the need to provide protection for civilians in time of war, the League of Arab States would also like to reiterate that it is keen to provide protection for Palestinian and Israeli civilians alike. However, we would also like to put things in their proper perspective. We are essentially dealing with a situation of Israeli military occupation of Palestinian territories and its consequences vis-à-vis the rejection of that occupation by the population. As part and parcel of the occupied territories, Gaza has suffered long and disproportionately under the strangulating aerial, naval and ground blockade that has led to the complete destruction of its infrastructure. That is in addition to the repeated starvation campaigns resulting from the closing of crossing points between Israel and Gaza and the ongoing refusal to allow basic goods to enter Gaza.

If we allow the Israeli propaganda machine to describe the situation regarding the psychological repercussions suffered by some inhabitants of southern Israel because of Hamas rocket attacks, how can we possibly ignore the humanitarian tragedy to which the entire population of Palestine is subject due to the military Israeli occupation and the complete blockade within which millions of Palestinians have to live?

Furthermore, if the Israelis reassert the claim that their armed action is being carried out in self-defence, to combat terrorism, and that what is happening now is actually part of the war on terror, then the time has come to denounce this untrue claim. The whole situation is due to the occupation. The whole world wants to see an end to that occupation, which has led to an extremely unstable situation. Continued Israeli aggression and actions against civilians have generated tension and rage in the Arab and Islamic world as a whole. This situation will not be helped by efforts that do not put an end to the events taking place in Gaza.

Once again, I would like to repeat the Arab rejection of attacks against innocent civilians on either side. The facts indicate that civilians on the Palestinian side are the primary victims not only of the most recent events, but also of the situation that prevailed before the current hostilities. I reiterate that the facts indicate that civilian Palestinian victims are in the hundreds as compared to one victim on the Israeli side.

Occupation is not the only reason for the current hostilities. There is also the failure of the peace process, the slightest progress in which would have calmed the situation. The lack of such progress has created a feeling of frustration and despair. We hope

that 2009 will mark a new beginning for the peace process that will enable us to address seriously and sincerely the most important problem — the Israeli occupation of Arab territories and its rejection of the establishment of a Palestinian State.

The time has come to put an end to all procrastination and delays, which will only lead to further humanitarian and material losses. The time has come to put an end to the siege, to aggression, to the confiscation of land and to its partition by Israeli settlers, none of which can lead to a healthy situation. The events in Gaza today as a result of this unhealthy situation is proof of that. The may actually spin out of control if we cannot put an immediate end to it through this Council.

The Security Council is the main body of the United Nations entrusted with the maintenance of international peace and security. The credibility of the Council in shouldering its responsibilities and the credibility of the United Nations are both at stake today. The Security Council should deal with such situations firmly, justly and objectively in a manner that furthers the goal of maintaining international peace and security.

Here, I would like to pay tribute to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and express to him our deep appreciation for his important statement today and for his position on the aggression against Gaza. I would also like to pay tribute to the United Nations entities that are working in extremely difficult circumstances over there, in particular the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

We have repeatedly complained of the Security Council's failure to swiftly take a firm position in addressing extremely serious situations that may threaten international peace and security. A serious precedent was set in 2006 when Israel attacked Lebanon and the Security Council did not take action for over a month, hoping that Israel would achieve its goals if given enough time. When that did not happen, the Security Council had to act. Israel had already stopped fearing the consequences of its continued aggression. We do not want a repeat of that tragedy.

The high-level Arab delegation is here for the next few days, and we are more than willing to help the Council if it is ready to shoulder its responsibilities. However, we cannot give Israel enough time to achieve its objectives; that is something that we cannot accept or be part of.

Here, I would like to mention a statement made yesterday by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Israel. Israel called upon the world to allow it to work to achieve its objectives until it declares to have done so. This was printed today in the New York Times. This is a clear message addressed to the Security Council. It must be clear that all these messages are addressed to us and we must react to them.

We have therefore insisted on presenting to the Council the draft resolution mentioned by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, His Royal Highness the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia and the President of Palestine.

The fact is that the Council has come under attack. Certain unusual remarks have been made by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Israel describing Security Council resolutions as "dead letters". Many might support her in her opinion, and that would be confirmed if the Security Council should fail to stand firm and address these threats to international peace and security. As stated by the Arab Group's representative on the Security Council, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, we are submitting a draft resolution in this regard, because the situation cannot wait any longer.

We have expressed our support for the initiative enunciated by President Mubarak and President Sarkozy. We see no contradiction between that initiative and the work of the Security Council. In fact, they complement each other. President Mubarak has stated that Egypt, which has opened the door to peace in the Middle East, cannot accept a continuation of the current situation, including procrastination by the Security Council in shouldering its responsibilities. Because the Security Council refuses to take action, the Egyptian and French Presidents have had to act, not to confront the Security Council, but rather to complement what we do here, since our objectives are the same.

Therefore, we support the initiative of the two Presidents while also insisting on formally making the position of the Arab Group very clear before the Council. We call for an immediate and lasting ceasefire, an end to all hostilities, violence and rocket attacks, a withdrawal by the Israeli forces, an end to the blockade and the opening of the crossings between

Israel and Gaza. We demand that Israel, as the occupying military Power of the Palestinian territories, allow for the safe passage of humanitarian assistance, medical aid, food and fuel to Gaza. We call for the establishment of a monitoring mechanism to provide protection to civilians, for a ceasefire and for restoration of calm in general.

In conclusion, I would like to say that we have carefully listened as every speaker has highlighted the importance of ensuring that the events in Gaza are not repeated in the future and of the absolute need to move effectively and quickly to end the crisis and to resume negotiations towards a solution to the Israeli/Palestinian and Israeli-Arab conflict.

We hope that, with a new Administration, this year will augur well for the peace process. We have seen certain progress on that track, and we in the Arab League will always be prepared to participate in any peace effort that represents a true move towards the objective sought by all of us, which is being impeded by Israeli practices in the occupied territories in complete disregard of Arab and international appeals. Here, I would also like to object to what was stated by our colleague from Israel that the world is divided between moderates and extremists. Yes, we agree. However, we may disagree over who are the moderates and who are the extremists. We also believe that there are even more divisions within those divisions — that is, between those who respect the provisions of international law and those who do not.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor His Excellency Mr. Jonas Støre, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Norway.

Mr. Støre (Norway): I am grateful for this opportunity to address the Security Council on the critical situation in Gaza. As Norwegian Foreign Minister, I add my voice tonight to all those who demand an immediate, effective and verifiable ceasefire and cessation of hostilities. The launching of rockets by Hamas targeting civilians inside Israel must stop. The Israeli shelling of Gaza from the air, sea and land must stop. Norway condemns the heavy ground operations that are exposing thousands and thousands of civilians and killing innocent women, men and children.

That escalation does not lead to peace and security for Israelis and Palestinians. It is a dreadful road to death, destruction, hatred and more desperation. It is a recipe for revenge and more terror. Political goals, however legitimate, will not be reached through war, military onslaught and destruction. After this war will come the day when the people of Gaza and Israel will still live next to each other. Palestinians will still be deprived of their unity and of their State, and Israelis will still be deprived of security.

The Security Council, which has the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, has so far been incapable of making any decision in the matter. That is a fact that I have a hard time trying to explain to the people of my country, who, together with hundreds of millions around the world, see the flickering television images of great human suffering day in and day out. Today, the news of the shelling of the school where people had sought refuge shocked us even more.

I therefore hope that the French-Egyptian initiative for an immediate ceasefire will succeed. As that initiative takes shape, I would hope that the details will be confirmed by a Security Council resolution.

A ceasefire must not be a return to the status quo ante, and therefore a ceasefire and the political process must address the critical outstanding issues: a stop to smuggling and the clandestine import of arms and their accessories and the immediate opening of border crossings for urgent humanitarian needs, followed by the presence of international monitors. Then, and soon, we need to address the challenge of new and urgent human needs caused by the current violence.

That is also why I would like to take the opportunity tonight to address the Security Council as Chair of the donor support group to the Palestinian Authority, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians (AHLC). As members will remember, just one year ago, Norway and France, together with the European Commission and Quarter Representative Tony Blair, hosted the donor conference for the Palestinians in Paris. That was a very successful undertaking thanks to France. The donor community made significant pledges both to the running of Palestinian Authority institutions and to the projects that could help boost the Palestinian economy.

In May last year in London, the AHLC reviewed the progress made by both the donors and the Palestinian Authority. Four months later, we noted further progress as we convened the AHLC here in

New York with the assistance of the Secretary-General, despite the numerous obstacles created by the occupation, the limits to access and movement and the growing number of settlements on Palestinian land.

Throughout recent years, Gaza has been a major concern, not least as a result of internal Palestinian strife and division, but also as a result of the Israeli siege on the enclave. Before the outbreak of the war, the isolation of Gaza had devastated the private sector, increased poverty and malnutrition and undermined the social and economic fabric of Gaza. The civilian population has been caged and severely traumatized.

As this ongoing war escalates, the supplies of water and energy, which were already insufficient, have more or less completely stopped. The main sewage plant in the north of Gaza is on the verge of collapse. We urgently need to address this humanitarian disaster. Two days ago, I received a letter from the Palestinian Authority Prime Minister, Salam Fayyad, outlining the budgetary outlook of the Authority for 2009. Despite some limited progress, deplorably the Palestinian economy will continue to depend on donors for a long time to come. Now, we need to add the consequences of the devastation in Gaza and the dire consequences that the war is having for the people, for the infrastructure and for the economy.

In consultation with Prime Minister Fayyad and the co-Chairs of the AHLC, Norway had originally planned to convene the AHLC some time during the first half of 2009. Under the present circumstances, I propose that the AHLC be convened as soon as possible. The situation is new and requires urgent action. The humanitarian needs demand relief. I ask for the Council's support for the holding of a special donor conference for Gaza, in conjunction with the AHLC meeting, as soon as possible.

When the hostilities cease, we need to start assessing both the immediate and the long-term needs. Those will have to be determined by a fact-finding and assessment mission led by the World Bank and the United Nations. Before then, we must immediately ease the suffering of the civilian population. International humanitarian law is crystal clear. Civilians should and must be protected. It is unacceptable that Hamas exposes civilians by taking its military arsenal and its fighting to densely populated areas. We call on Israel to comply with its obligations under the Geneva Conventions to allow the unhindered access of humanitarian supplies to Gaza. We urgently call on Israel to ensure that food, water and medicines gain access and unhindered distribution to the civilian population. We must empower the most effective providers of humanitarian assistance to conduct their activities; the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East is critical in that context.

I should like to add one point. Since the beginning of hostilities, independent reporters have been denied access to the war zone. That is regrettable and unacceptable. We demand of Israel that reporters be allowed to do their regular work inside Gaza.

Finally, the division among Palestinians is a tragedy. Let me commend President Mubarak and Egypt for their steadfast efforts to heal that division, for which the citizens of Gaza have already paid a high price. The question of the governance of Gaza must be addressed. The people of Gaza deserve stable, democratic and peaceful governance. A power vacuum in Gaza after the end of hostilities will further plunge the civilian population into misery. In that context, I welcome President Abbas's call for a national unity Government and the holding of elections.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Norway for the initiatives he has just announced.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Egypt.

Mr. Aboul Gheit (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is 10 days since the start of the Israeli military aggression against the Gaza Strip. It is 10 days since the start of an operation of killing and methodical destruction by Israel against the people of Gaza. It is 10 days, and Israel is telling us daily that it is about to achieve its military objectives, while the media are showing us daily, nay hourly, horrific scenes of the bodies of children laid next to each other, families that have been completely decimated and innocent civilians who have been crushed by the Israeli military machine — almost 600 to date and 3,000 thousand wounded, and the Council is still silent.

We cannot imagine what the Council needs to assume its responsibility to stop that aggression. Does it need more Palestinians killed and wounded before it takes a decision that would commit Israel to stop its military action? Perhaps it requires another solution

that would give the occupying Power some political gains as another way of crowning its military aggression. In this respect, the Council stalling has undermined its credibility and the confidence of our peoples in the Council and in its neutrality and objectivity in dealing with the Palestinian question.

As members know very well, Egypt is in a unique situation as far as the current events are concerned, as the immediately adjacent neighbour of the Gaza Strip, where the Israeli aggression is taking place, and because its central role in having helped the Israelis and Palestinians attain a period of calm that lasted six months until just one week before the aggression and despite violations by both sides. Furthermore, Egypt is in a well-known position in view of its role in sponsoring the Palestinian national reconciliation.

I should like to explain our view of a way out of this situation. Let me quote from the statement made this evening by President Mubarak in a joint press conference with President Sarkozy:

> "The situation in Gaza continues to deteriorate for a second week, with continual destructive and deadly Israeli attacks targeting innocent civilians, causing tensions to escalate and undermining regional stability.
>
> "Egypt, which opened the door to peace in the Middle East and has supported the Palestinian cause for 60 years, cannot accept a continuation of the current situation, with the Palestinian and Israeli sides clinging to their positions and the Security Council delaying the fulfilment of its responsibilities.
>
> "Egypt has been pursuing active efforts since the first day of the hostilities, and today I am putting forward an initiative specifically designed to contain the situation, based on the following elements.
>
> "First, Israel and the Palestinian factions shall agree to an immediate ceasefire for a specified period to allow the opening of corridors for aid to the inhabitants of the Strip and to allow Egypt to pursue efforts towards a complete and permanent ceasefire.
>
> "Secondly, Egypt calls on Israel and the Palestinian sides to meet immediately to conclude arrangements and guarantees to prevent a repetition of the present escalation. The causes of that escalation, including the question of securing the borders, should be addressed to allow for the reopening of border crossings and the lifting of the blockade. Egypt is prepared to take part in these discussions along with the Palestinian and Israeli sides, and with the European Union and the other members of the Quartet.
>
> "Thirdly, Egypt renews its call on the Palestinian National Authority and all Palestinian factions to respond to Egyptian efforts to bring about Palestinian reconciliation, which is indispensable for overcoming the challenges facing the Palestinian people and the Palestinian cause both in the current critical situation and in the future.
>
> "Egypt is carrying out its responsibility in putting forward this initiative and expects the Israeli and Palestinian sides, as well as other regional and international parties, to fulfil their responsibilities in order to stop the bloodshed and renew hopes for peace."

I would also like to reaffirm a crucial point: the Gaza Strip is an integral part of the Palestinian territory that was occupied by Israel in 1967 — which also includes the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Therefore, the occupying Power has responsibilities towards the population of the land that it occupies. This responsibility is well-known and must be recognized.

Since the beginning of the Israeli aggression, on 27 December, Egypt has made extensive efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to the affected population in the Gaza Strip. In this respect, Egypt has since the first day used the Rafah crossing to enable individuals to deliver some assistance in the form of small shipments. The Egyptian Red Crescent, in cooperation with the Palestinian side, has been able to deliver some 120 tons of medicines and other medical supplies through the crossing, in addition to some 300 additional tones of foodstuffs through the Karam Abu Salem crossing. Egyptian hospitals have so far received 120 injured persons and we are making preparations to receive more wounded as the Palestinian side is able and willing to transfer them outside the Strip. Moreover, since yesterday, we have sent approximately 500 tons of foodstuffs via Al-Aouja through Karam Abu Salem crossing and onwards to the Strip.

Here I would like to express our thanks to all the sisterly Arab and Islamic countries which offered their services, especially medical services, to relieve the suffering of the Palestinians in Gaza through Egypt. Egypt has adequate capacity and will to deal with the situation, and we will continue our extensive efforts to deliver all the assistance from our brothers to the Gaza Strip despite the current difficulties.

We have come here as an Arab ministerial delegation to demonstrate the utmost importance attached by all Arab countries to ending this aggression immediately and to ridding the Palestinians of the horrors of the Israeli military machine. But this does not prevent us from calling upon the Council not to turn a blind eye to the current events or to overlook the fact that the main tragedy lies in the continued Israeli occupation of Palestinian land. The effort that truly must be made is the effort to end the occupation as soon as possible and establish an independent Palestinian State, with full and intensified international support and encouragement for the negotiations that are necessary to achieve our aim, as provided for in Council resolution 1850 (2008).

I am certain that this is the real objective and that it should not be overlooked by the Council. This requires extensive efforts and follow-up by the Council, as provided for in the resolution to which I have just referred.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Egypt for his proposals.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Salah Bashir, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Jordan.

Mr. Bashir (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): Permit me at the outset to express our gratitude to you, Mr. President, for responding to our request for an open meeting and for working with us over the past two days to achieve a result that will put an end to the human tragedy unfolding in the Gaza Strip. Jordan feels deep pain and concern at the grave situation, the escalation of violence and the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip as a result of the irresponsible and horrendous military aggression carried out by Israel, in addition to its effects on the peace process and the stability of our region, which has long suffered from the scourge of war.

In addition to condemning this aggression, which has claimed the lives of hundreds of innocent civilians, we call on the international community, led by the Security Council, to shoulder its political, moral and legal responsibilities by adopting a draft resolution that will force Israel to end to its aggression and its policies of collective punishment against Palestinian civilians and will alleviate the human suffering caused by its military operations, which are a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law, the Fourth Geneva Convention and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The people and the Government of Jordan are fully committed to supporting the Palestinian people in their humanitarian crisis. His Majesty King Abdullah Bin Al Hussein has from the beginning of the aggression intensified his contacts with various political leaders throughout the world in order to achieve an immediate cessation of hostilities through the Security Council. His Majesty the King has ordered that all Jordanian hospitals be opened, that all Jordanian capacities be placed at the service of our Palestinian brothers and that field hospitals be prepared and sent to Gaza. Hashemite charitable associations are doing their utmost, and all of Jordan is prepared to work around the clock to ensure the delivery of international humanitarian assistance through its territory.

Peace and security cannot be achieved by carrying out military operations against a population whose men, women, children and the elderly have already been weakened by the siege. Those operations will not help Israel, but will only arouse feelings of anger among Arabs and Muslims throughout the world.

What we are now witnessing is inhuman Israeli exploitation of the situation aimed at achieving false internal gains. What Israel is doing does not reflect a genuine interest in peace. Peace cannot be achieved by shedding the blood of Palestinian children; peace cannot be achieved by ignoring the appeals of the international community; peace cannot be achieved by violating international law, in particular those provisions that impose responsibilities on occupying forces towards their occupied population. Israel cannot achieve security by killing innocent unarmed civilians in the Gaza Strip, by targeting schools, universities and houses of worship and by creating a humanitarian tragedy for the Palestinian people. Past experiences have proved those truths, and this aggression will be no exception.

The Arab States have submitted a draft resolution to the Security Council calling for a ceasefire. We have worked and will continue working with the Council to draft balanced language resulting in a resolution that will fulfil the Council's objective of maintaining international peace and security. It would be senseless should the Council fail, despite the urgency and immediacy of the situation, to adopt a resolution that would put an end to the sufferings of the Palestinians. That would mean that our humanity had been defeated by Israel's intransigence.

Has the international community reached the point where it can turn a blind eye to the killing, displacement, fear and hunger that have been imposed on the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip? Does the work of the Council now serve the interests of one party, without taking international humanitarian responsibilities into consideration? The international community must recognize the rights of the people of Gaza. The international community must not fail to respond to their appeals and must stop justifying their continued suffering with the Israeli excuse of self-defence. The Security Council must recall that for more than 40 years the Gaza Strip and all the Palestinian territories have been subjected to an aggression called military occupation.

The international community must shoulder its responsibilities by providing the Palestinians with protection and humanitarian assistance, by addressing what is now occurring in Gaza and by dealing with the conspiracy aimed at destroying the future of the Palestinian people and their inalienable rights, including the right to establish an independent Palestinian State.

Today, the international community must impose a ceasefire in order to stop the bloodshed. It must establish arrangements that will prevent further deterioration of the situation by alleviating the humanitarian and economic distress of the Palestinian people, putting an end to all military operations and compelling Israel to withdraw to the positions it occupied before 27 December 2008, to life the siege, to open all border crossings under its control and to permit medical and humanitarian assistance and the evacuation of the wounded.

The international community must support and facilitate the work of United Nations agencies and organs create an international monitoring mechanism to supervise the ceasefire, protect the Palestinian people and ensure that all parties carry out their obligations with a view to the emergence of Gaza from the destruction it is suffering and the establishment of an independent, contiguous and viable Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Israel must understand that peace can be achieved only through dialogue and serious negotiations that will provide the Palestinian Authority with legitimacy in order to fulfil the aspirations of the Palestinian people to establish an independent, viable and contiguous State. Returning to the negotiating table is the only way to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in accordance with international legitimacy, including the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Israel's use of extensive military force not only threatens the stability of the region, but also undermines all efforts by the Security Council to achieve peace in the Middle East in accordance with resolution 1850 (2008). It also threatens the entire peace process aimed at finding a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict based on the two-State formula, which is a sine qua non for peace and stability in the region.

Jordan has great hopes for the sincere and extensive efforts of the Security Council and appreciates the Egyptian initiative, which should serve as an incentive to make progress in ending this tragic situation, by providing humanitarian assistance to the brotherly Palestinian people, alleviating their suffering and returning to serious negotiations in order to achieve the two-State solution, which is the only way to ensure security and stability in the region.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Mr. Fawzi Salloukh, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Lebanon.

Mr. Salloukh (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): First of all, Mr. President, I would like to thank you, as well as your friendly country, for your sustained efforts and for clear, unequivocal position on the need for an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire following Israeli aggression against Gaza. We would also like to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his tireless efforts and resolve.

We have come to speak to the Council on behalf of the thousands of civilian casualties who have fallen

in Gaza — on behalf of the children, women and other innocent Palestinians, who continue to fall on an ongoing basis under Israeli bombings. I speak on behalf of the inhabitants of Gaza, who for decades now have lived under blockade, occupation and a policy of collective punishment.

We have come to say that every minute this continues, it claims an additional innocent victim and increases the number of orphans, widows and disabled persons. As a result, the legal, political and above all moral duty and responsibility of the Council require it to adopt immediately and without further delay a clear and binding resolution calling for an immediate and complete ceasefire, the lifting of the unjust air, land and sea blockade imposed by Israel on Gaza, and the opening of all crossing points.

We must not lose sight of the fact that the Israeli aggression hardly begin on 27 December 2008. In fact, it has been going on for decades through occupation, oppression, suffocating blockade, the closure of crossing points, limitations imposed on the daily routines and subsistence of Palestinians, denying them the right to a decent life. Gaza remains under occupation and, as the Council knows, occupation is the most abject form of aggression. The siege persists, and the blockade is another form of aggression.

This blind violence and these systematic crimes by Israel are not aimed at a specific faction of the Palestinian people, as is claimed by Israel. Israel seeks first and foremost to undermine hope in the hearts of the Palestinian people for a decent and safe life that would allow them to fully recover their legitimate rights through the option of peace and international legitimacy. The dangers of Israel's aggression are not confined to its direct actions because they also contribute to the exacerbation of bitterness and hatred by undermining all hope for a future and a better day tomorrow.

Because they jeopardize the peace process, usurping force and the killing of civilians cannot achieve security. Quite the contrary, a true and lasting peace can only be the fruit of a credible political process that engenders hope for a better future for people. Consequently, it is vital that we achieve an immediate, permanent and unconditional ceasefire with the immediate withdrawal of Israel to pre-27 December 2008 Israeli positions; end the blockade and reopen crossing points; and normalize life by authorizing without delay access for humanitarian convoys to those in need. We must ensure that the Palestinian people are not once again targeted by Israeli aggression, because regardless of Israeli's claims, the Palestinian people are unarmed when compared to the behemoth of the Israeli army.

We must also note Israel's responsibility, as the occupying Power, for practices that are at odds with international law and particularly international humanitarian law, which require us to provide appropriate protection for the Palestinian people. We hope that the Council will not repeat the errors 2006, when it acted late in putting an end to the Israeli killing of the people of Lebanon. That is why we truly hope that the Council will be able to take up the challenge, that it will not disappoint unarmed civilians and that it will be up to the task of upholding its responsibilities to all humankind. In fact, this is a trial which we must all undergo successfully. May we all live up to that responsibility, because we would not wish to burden our conscience with more massacres, such as that perpetrated by Israel today by targeting the UNRWA school in Jabaliya.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Taïb Fassi Fihri, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Morocco.

Mr. Fassi Fihri (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Security Council's meeting today regarding the very crucial and difficult situation in the Middle East — the result of the horrendous Israeli aggression against the Palestinian territories in Gaza. The continuous menace has lasted for 11 days, the last four of which have witnessed ever more serious escalations as a result of the air, land and sea operations by the Israeli military machine. Israel has used every indiscriminate lethal weapon, destroying homes and their occupants, exterminating entire families and creating orphaned children and infants. Indeed, neither the mosques, nor the schools, nor the funeral homes, nor the ambulances have escaped the might of the Israeli military machine, which has left a broad swath of destruction of property and infrastructure. There has been heart-wrenching and horrendous bloodshed, murder and the killing of innocent civilians.

This painful situation imposes a special responsibility on the French presidency of the Security Council. You, Mr. President, represent a State that has been fully versed in all aspects of the issue before the

Council for more than half a century. This issue has many emotional and political implications, as recognized in the proactive and responsible initiative to harmonize positions undertaken in the context of the President Sarkozy's visit to the countries of the region.

I would also like to commend His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon and thank him for the firm and principled positions he has taken since the beginning of Israel's aggression against the Gaza Strip.

The level and mandate of the committee of the League of Arab States attest clearly to the grave concern of people in Arab countries with regard to the seriousness of the situation in Gaza and its implications for the peace and stability of the region as a whole. They also reflect the concern and commitment of Arab countries to responsibly and constructively adopting and implementing the decisive political positions called for by current events.

The eyes of the whole world are on the Council today. The world is hoping that it will assume its responsibilities by putting an end to the bloodbath, maintaining international peace and security and compelling Israel to immediately halt the activities of its military machine and lift the siege on the Palestinian people, who have suffered hugely from the scourge war and displacement. In the face of this escalating crisis, the Security Council cannot but assume its political, , moral and humanitarian responsibilities to the brotherly Palestinian people and all the peoples of the region.

The Security Council and the international community at large must call the occupying Power to task on its legal and political obligations, including with regard to the provisions of international law and international humanitarian law and norms. In that connection, the Security Council is called upon to assume its responsibility to deter Israel from continuing its aggression before it further escalates the situation in a way that would have consequences of which we are all aware. The Council must do so by adopting a strong, enforceable and comprehensive resolution.

The Arab Group has very carefully crafted its draft resolution to respond to all objective and reasonable elements proposed, as well as to take into account the concerns of everyone. The Group has always been prepared to discuss all the ideas put forth. Given the escalation of the situation and the rising number of victims, the Group of Arab States calls upon the Council to respond positively to the provisions of the draft resolution that the Arab Group has submitted.

In addition to its horrendousness, what is taking place in Gaza should not lead us to forget that the Palestinian territories have suffered from siege and oppression for years. That is the fundamental tragedy that the Palestinian people have experienced for decades. That tragedy has also been subject to Israel's policy of establishing settlements and its ongoing attempts to Judaize Jerusalem and eradicate its Islamic character, to which His Majesty King Mohammed VI has called for an end.

It is high time that the international community assume its historic responsibilities towards the Palestinian people and the other peoples of the region in order to end repeated tragedies and contribute to the establishment of an atmosphere conducive to the resumption and acceleration of negotiations on the right track with a view to reaching a just and comprehensive solution to the problem of the Middle East that ensures Israel's withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State. That requires stepping up efforts to achieve national reconciliation and unity among the Palestinians and the strengthening of their legitimate institutions. The Palestinian people are one people, destined to live in dignity in a land that is united, independent and viable, with East Jerusalem as its capital, side by side with the State of Israel in mutual peace and security and in accordance with international legitimacy, the principle of land for peace, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ahmad bin Abdulla Al-Mahmoud, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar.

Mr. Al-Mahmoud (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting to address the atrocities being committed in the occupied Palestinian Gaza Strip. I would also like to take this opportunity to wish you every success in your presidency of the Council in these difficult circumstances. Through you, Sir, I would also like to extend my thanks to the Secretary-General for his repeated calls to stop the ongoing violence in Gaza. I should also like to express my gratitude to the

President of the General Assembly for his extensive efforts and his fair-minded statement in that regard.

I will not cite the horrendous atrocities committed since 27 December 2008 by the Israeli war machine against the unarmed civilians of the afflicted Palestinian territory, nor will I refer to the killing, destruction, tragedy and violations of every human right that the Security Council has heard of and witnessed as a result of the recent Israeli aggression. Schools, hospitals and places of worship have not been spared the mass destruction resulting from that aggression, which has taken place in blatant violation of the rules of international humanitarian law.

The world has just seen how Israel assassinated more than 40 civilians in cold blood, including women and children, in a school of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. I do not think there is a need to remind the Council about what it has heard over the past few months with regard to the serious consequences of the Israeli siege imposed on the Gaza Strip and the grave humanitarian situation that it has caused. As we approached the new year celebrations, we were hopeful that the world would enjoy a quiet season and that the new year would bring new hopes for a better future. But Israel's position is different from the international community's.

I have come here with my brothers, the Arab ministers, as part of the ministerial committee that the Arab Council of Ministers decided to establish at its extraordinary meeting last Wednesday and to send to New York to urge the Security Council to end its foot- on an issue that poses a direct, clear and serious threat to international peace and security and has also resulted in a dire humanitarian situation. Arab States and other peace-loving countries of the world were unanimous in expressing their solidarity with the Palestinian people in connection with their suffering as a result of Israel's brutal occupation and recent attack on Gaza, and well as in standing by Palestinians in their just struggle to achieve their legitimate and inalienable rights, in particular their right to independence, self-determination and statehood on their own national soil, with Jerusalem as its capital.

We therefore demand that the Security Council assume its responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations and not settle for making press statements, but rather immediately adopt a resolution that compels Israel, the occupying Power, to stop its land, sea and air military aggression on the Gaza Strip; immediately withdraw its forces; lift the siege on Gaza; open the crossings; end the policy of collective punishment; and provide protection for the Palestinian people, including the protection of health and educational institutions that are safe havens, as attacks on such safe havens are illegal.

The reluctance to adopt a resolution in this regard gives a green light to Israel to continue its war crimes, in flagrant violation of the relevant conventions, laws and international norms. Such stalling is incongruent with the mandate of this Council and proves that this important organ is in need of reform.

The international community is not witnessing an ordinary war but a new Israeli aggression, similar to the summer of 2006 aggression on Lebanon, with the most advanced and lethal weapons being used against Palestinian people, in violation of international peace and security. This tragedy strikes at the core of the mandate of this Council, the credibility of which is now being called into question. We have already repeatedly urged the Council and the Quartet to work sincerely towards the implementation of the Council's decisions on peace in the Middle East.

On the other hand, General Assembly resolution 60/1 on the outcome of the 2005 World Summit, and specifically its provisions regarding human security, the responsibility to protect and the culture of peace, requires the United Nations to carry out its duty with respect to protecting the Palestinian people from Israeli aggression. Resolution 1674 (2006) on the protection of civilians in armed conflict requires the United Nations to come to the rescue of the Palestinians and to criminalize the Israeli acts of aggression.

The State of Qatar is eager to do its duty as an active member of the United Nations. His Highness the Emir of the State of Qatar, in his speech on 4 January 2009, which has been issued as a document of the United Nations, called upon the international community to protect and give relief to the Palestinians and emphasized that the killing of innocent civilians and the Israeli military aggression will not bring security neither to Israel nor to us as Arabs, but will instead result in disastrous consequences. Did the people who prepared for this war think of the anger of generations of Arabs and Palestinians, which will only grow as they witness such scenes? How can Israeli

military aggression contribute to the achievement of a lasting and comprehensive peace in the region?

The division, by some, of Palestine into Hamas and Fatah is unacceptable, since the occupation does not distinguish between parties, but is all-encompassing. Therefore, we should not accept any Palestinian national differences as an excuse for Israel to continue its occupation and aggression against a defenceless people, or allow it to use such differences as an excuse to divide the Palestinian people and Palestinian land. We must not punish the Palestinian people for having exercised their right to vote, in accordance with the principles of democracy that we all call for. At this time, we urge the Palestinians to achieve unity and consensus in their plight.

The excuses proffered by Israel concerning Palestinian rocket attacks cannot deceive wise people, although some may think of them as the factor that sparked the current crisis. It must be recalled that the occupation of the Palestinian territory is the cause of the rocket attacks. Consequently, the occupation must end if calm is to be restored. Even if we acknowledge that excluding Hamas is in Israel's best security interests, can we consider as self-defence an all-out military aggression against a densely populated city in which — as the aggressor is aware — the casualties will be civilians?

Israel uses self-defence as a pretext under the United Nations Charter, but the latter gives peoples the right to self-determination and to an end to occupation. Therefore, what Israel is committing is genocide and ethnic cleansing carried out by an entity that claims to be representing democracy and freedom.

In conclusion, we are facing an extremely difficult humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territory. While we thank all peace-loving nations for standing with the Palestinian people in their plight, we call on all donors to contribute urgently, to provide more humanitarian assistance and to support relief organizations operating in the Gaza Strip. Allow me to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the efforts of those institutions, especially the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, in carrying out their humanitarian duty in a dangerous work environment.

The State of Qatar has been among the leading supporters of the Palestinian people at the bilateral level, through the decisions of the Council of the League of Arab States and through the United Nations. We have recently sent aid to the Palestinians by sea and air. We strongly support their just cause, as we will not allow the brotherly Palestinian people to be brought to its knees.

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with the agreement reached by the Security Council in its prior consultations, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to suspend this meeting until tomorrow at 11 a.m.

The meeting was suspended at 9 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.6061 (Resumption 1)

Security Council

Sixty-fourth year

Provisional

6061st meeting

Wednesday, 7 January 2009, 11 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Lacroix	(France)
Members:	Austria	Mr. Ebner
	Burkina Faso	Mr. Kafando
	China	Mr. Huang Hongjiang
	Costa Rica	Mr. Urbina
	Croatia	Mr. Skračić
	Japan	Mr. Takasu
	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	Mr. Gouider
	Mexico	Mr. Heller
	Russian Federation	Mr. Yakovenko
	Turkey	Mr. İlkin
	Uganda	Mr. Butagira
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mr. DeLaurentis
	Viet Nam	Mr. Bui The Giang

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A.

09-20163 (E)

The meeting was resumed at 11.10 a.m.

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite the representatives of Argentina, Australia, Bolivia, Brazil, Cuba, the Czech Republic, Ecuador, Iceland, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Malaysia, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Paraguay and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to take part in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, the representatives of the aforementioned countries took seats at the side of the Chamber.

The President (*spoke in French*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 7 January 2009 from His Excellency Mr. Paul Badji, Permanent Representative of Senegal, in which he requests to be invited, in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda.

If I hear no objection, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Paul Badji.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I invite Mr. Badji to take the seat reserved for him at the side of the Council Chamber.

In accordance with the understanding reached among Council members, I wish to request all speakers to limit their statements to no more than five minutes, in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate their texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

I now give the floor to the representative of Malaysia.

Mr. Ali (Malaysia): Israeli military aggression into Gaza is entering its thirteenth day today. Over the course of just less than two weeks, more than 600 lives have been lost and more than 2,700 people injured, the largest majority being Palestinian civilians, including women and children.

Only yesterday, an Israeli attack killed at least 43 people and wounded about 100, who were taking refuge inside a United Nations school. There is no need to even mention the level and degree of destruction to mosques, schools, homes and infrastructure that that illegal Israeli action has brought upon the Palestinians in Gaza, because any sensible person can imagine what kind of destruction 13 days of Israeli bombardment could bring about. Any right-minded sensible person and Government would also deplore that Israeli action. There is no justification for that disproportionate, indiscriminate and excessive use of force in Gaza, not even in the name of self-defence. The Israeli action is against the rule of law and modern standards of human decency. Its actions clearly demonstrate Israel's complete disregard for international law and its violation of the United Nations Charter. Malaysia considers that act as a war crime and a crime against humanity.

How could the death of innocent civilians, particularly women and children, be in the name of self-defence? How could any other Member States of this United Nations accept that argument and condone that action? How could the Security Council, which is entrusted with the maintenance of peace and security, not react to a clear violation of international peace and security? How many more deaths and casualties and how much more destruction will it take before the Security Council is resuscitated from its paralysis in dealing with the Palestinian issue?

Is it that, after almost two weeks into the illegal Israeli aggression towards the people of Gaza, the Security Council is now struggling to stop those atrocities? We do not believe so, at least not judging by how fast it reacted in other situations. On many occasions we have expressed our deep regret over this matter, and we once again record our deepest regret at this apparent inaction by the Security Council.

However, despite that, we remain confident that this Security Council, which is mandated to ensure international peace and security, will take the necessary and appropriate action in dealing with the Israeli aggression. In fact, the Council has no option but to do just that — to stop the killing of innocent civilians and women and children and the destruction of homes,

schools, mosques and other infrastructure. A durable and sustainable cessation of hostility, including a ceasefire, must be the immediate target, with the deployment of an international monitoring or peacekeeping force to de-escalate and stabilize the situation. Israeli forces must leave the Gaza Strip. Unless it does so immediately, there will be no let-up in the death toll. One dead is far too many and the blood of those who have perished and been injured by that illegal Israeli action will also be on the hands of the Security Council.

Malaysia urges all parties to exercise the utmost restraint, in particular to avoid additional casualties among innocent civilians and damage to civilian property and infrastructure, and to refrain from acts that could further exacerbate the situation.

We also urge this Council to ensure the immediate lifting of the blockade on Gaza. The destruction resulting from Israeli aggression has further aggravated the humanitarian crisis of the beleaguered people of Gaza, who urgently need food, fuel and medicine. Israel, the occupying Power, must be made to allow international assistance to reach the people of Gaza. Despite repeated Israeli denials, what the people of Gaza have faced prior to the recent Israeli assault is nothing less than a man-made humanitarian crisis caused by the Israeli siege of Gaza, which is a point of significant importance, as it shows that the people of Gaza are not suffering from a lack of resources.

The root cause of the current violence in the Middle East is the occupation of Palestinian territories by Israel. It began in 1947, when people living on the periphery of the war in Europe found themselves displaced and dispossessed to make way for another group of people torn by that conflict, and went on to the 1967 Israeli military aggression and continued expansion of Israel's occupation of Palestinian land.

Since that time, a new theatre of conflict has emerged in the Middle East, which has impacted the state of peace and security globally. Since then, too, the Security Council, in its wisdom, has adopted several resolutions, including 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1515 (2003) and, most recently, 1850 (2008), aimed at addressing that occupation, which is the longest known in modern history. But the occupation persists and, even worse, despite efforts towards a durable and lasting peace, including the Quartet Road Map and the Arab initiative, a comprehensive solution continues to elude us, not for lack of effort but through the sheer intransigent practices and policies of the Israeli regime.

As recently as a year ago, in clear contravention of its obligations under the Annapolis understanding, the machinery of the Israeli occupation regime plodded on relentlessly. The separation wall continued to be constructed. The illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied territories mushroomed. The network of checkpoints and roadblocks continued to inextricably hinder the movement and economic activities of Palestinians.

How could one expect or even hope for a tangible outcome from the peace process when one party, the oppressed, is being asked continuously to make concessions for peace when its homes are being demolished, its lands and farms confiscated, its families and communities separated and its children uprooted schools and even killed in schools? The harsh facts of life, especially for the children living under the occupation, will bear negatively not only on them when they enter adulthood but also on the prospects for peace in the Middle East.

Indeed, the present situation is not conducive to durable and lasting peace. The continuing loss of life, the infliction of serious injury and the devastation of property will only deepen hatred and divisions and will not do any good to either party. Only negotiations leading to a two-State solution will bring about a durable and lasting peace for Israelis and Palestinians and for the entire Middle East.

The path to peace is clear. Right now, we must stop the violence and the killing. The Security Council must act now. The Council must make every effort to ensure that this Israeli military aggression cease immediately. We reiterate that the Council must exert every effort for an immediate ceasefire and the deployment of an international force so as to de-escalate the conflict and stabilize the situation, and establish other confidence-building measures between the parties with the objective of resuming the peace process. While ensuring the implementation of the ceasefire, the Security Council must also ensure the complete observance of the Council's previous resolutions, including among others resolution 242 (1967) which clearly specifies that Israeli forces must withdraw from the occupied Palestinian territories.

At the same time, we also call on the leaders of Hamas and Fatah and implore them to initiate talks

immediately to resolve their differences. Reconciliation should be a priority if these leaders are genuinely committed to pursuing the objective of creating a sovereign and independent State of Palestine. Unity among the Palestinians themselves is the most critical element in attaining a solution to the predicament faced by all Palestinians.

Last year, we failed to make 2008 the year of a peace treaty between Israel and Palestine as envisioned in the Annapolis understanding. Let us concentrate our efforts again on achieving the goal we set last year — the solution of two States living side by side in peace and security, with the creation of a sovereign State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital. For now, let us stop the bloodshed in Gaza before the situation spirals further, leaving no chance and hope for peace.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Mr. Moreno (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the honour of participating in this debate on behalf of the 118 members of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The Movement has followed the events in Gaza with the utmost concern. On 29 December, the Coordinating Bureau of the Movement, which I have the honour of chairing, issued a statement in response to the military aggression launched by Israel in the Gaza Strip. Subsequently, on Monday 5 January, only 48 hours ago, the Coordinating Bureau issued a new statement on the escalation of military activities. The Movement's position with regard to the situation in Gaza has been made duly clear to you, Sir, in your capacity as President of the Security Council, as well as to the President of the General Assembly and to the Secretary-General.

The Non-Aligned Movement vigorously condemns the escalation of the military aggression being carried out by Israel, the occupying Power, in the Gaza Strip. The Movement is gravely concerned by and condemns in particular the Israeli ground invasion into Gaza, in flagrant defiance of the calls of the international community for a cessation of military activities and of the regional and international diplomatic efforts under way to resolve the current crisis.

The Non-Aligned Movement expresses its deep regret at the loss of innocent life as a result of the Israeli military attacks against the Strip, including the killing of hundreds of Palestinian civilians, among them many children, the injuring of several thousand persons, and the massive destruction of property and infrastructure in the Gaza Strip.

The Movement reiterates that this unacceptable Israeli military aggression against the Palestinian civilian population in Gaza constitutes a grave violation of international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law, and that it is intensifying the cycle of violence and threatening international peace and security, as well as the fragile peace process between the two sides.

The Non-Aligned Movement calls for the immediate cessation of all military activities and violence and for the implementation of an immediate general ceasefire. Israel should immediately end all its military attacks and strictly abide by all of its obligations as the occupying Power under international law and relevant United Nations resolutions. In this regard, the Movement urges Israel to unconditionally comply with its obligations under international law, including the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 12 August 1949.

In view of the indiscriminate bombings affecting the civilian population, including women and children, as well as the severe humanitarian crisis prevailing in Gaza, the Non-Aligned Movement also calls for the immediate provision of protection for the Palestinian civilian population in the Gaza Strip, in accordance with the relevant provisions of international humanitarian law.

The Movement expresses increasingly grave concern with regard to the humanitarian crisis being faced by the Palestinian population in Gaza as a result of the ongoing military actions, the continued closure of all border crossings and the obstruction of access to humanitarian aid, including food and medicines, and the reduction of fuel and electricity supplies to the Gaza Strip by Israel. In this context, the Non-Aligned Movement calls upon Israel to end the collective punishment of the Palestinian people and to allow for the immediate and sustained opening of the border crossings into the Gaza Strip in order to ensure the free access of humanitarian aid and other essential supplies and goods, as well as to facilitate the passage of persons to and from the Gaza Strip.

In light of the gravity of this crisis, the Non-Aligned Movement expresses its profound disappointment at the inability of the Security Council to uphold its responsibilities to maintain international peace and security. Despite more than a week of sustained military attacks that have gravely affected the civilian population and heightened instability and tensions in the region, the Council has regrettably been unable to take any concrete measures to end the aggression. Once again, the Movement requests the Security Council to act urgently to address this grave situation.

NAM stresses that the international community must intensify and coordinate its efforts to put an end to this crisis and must take the required actions to support and promote the peace process and ensure compliance with international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law. That is the key to a peaceful settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the Arab-Israeli conflict as a whole, and is the only way to guarantee a lasting peace in the region.

The Movement is convinced that there can be no military solution to the conflict. In that context, NAM reaffirms its commitment to a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to the right of the Palestinian people to exercise self-determination and sovereignty in an independent State of Palestine based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on the representative of Brazil.

Mrs. Viotti (Brazil): Brazil is deeply concerned at the magnitude and gravity of developments in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in recent days. Through press releases issued since the start of the Israeli operation in Gaza, Brazil has made its views widely known. We condemn the violence on all sides and deplore Israel's disproportionate military response to unlawful rocket attacks against its territory, which also must cease. The new cycle of violence is inflicting extraordinary pain and anguish on civilians. We call for an immediate ceasefire and for the opening of border crossings to the Gaza Strip to allow for the access of humanitarian aid and to alleviate the unsustainable humanitarian situation there.

The ceasefire is ever more needed in the light of the spiralling death toll and the desperate plight of the residents of Gaza, where impartial and respected observers, including the United Nations, agree that a humanitarian catastrophe is in the horizon. The loss of innocent lives in Israel is also saddening and must be stopped.

Furthermore, we add our voice to those of Security Council members in their call for a negotiated solution. Lasting peace can be achieved only through the creation of an independent Palestinian State living peacefully side by side with Israel within internationally recognized borders and in full compliance with Security Council resolutions.

Today, international public opinion expects effective action from the United Nations and its Member States. In such an endeavour, the Security Council has a key — although not an exclusive — role to play. We all share a collective interest in a respected and active Council. Its legitimacy and effectiveness would be diminished if it were to be perceived as hesitant to fulfil its legal and political obligation to maintain and restore international peace and security.

Recently, President Lula has reaffirmed our willingness to cooperate more intensely with the international community in order to defuse the current crisis and truly advance the cause of peace. That would be the main purpose of the expanded conference recently proposed by President Lula himself. Such an initiative could facilitate the work of the Council.

Brazilian Minister for Foreign Affairs Celso Amorim will soon visit the region. He will discuss possible ways to effectively address the current crisis and to help Israelis and Palestinians achieve peace. We are encouraged by the initiative of Presidents Mubarak and Sarkozy, announced yesterday. We also welcome the visit by the Secretary-General to the region. A special session of the Human Rights Council, presently under consideration, might also strengthen our collective endeavours. In addition, improving humanitarian assistance is imperative. At the request of the Palestinian Authority, Brazil is sending 14 tons of food and medicine to Gaza.

Such efforts, however do not exempt this organ from carrying out its most urgently needed action, which is to demand that all parties halt the violence immediately. A ceasefire called for by the Security Council must be fully implemented by all parties. After so many decades, no one can have the slightest illusion that there is a military solution to the conflict or that lasting political gains can be achieved through the use of force. Nor can violence be allowed to serve as a

political tool. An international mechanism to monitor a sustained cessation of hostilities could be put in place. Brazil would be willing to contribute to such a mechanism if the parties found it useful.

Just as important, the Council must ensure that all parties fully satisfy the humanitarian and economic needs of the Gaza Strip. All sides — including, given its relative strength, the State of Israel in particular — must, in each and every case and at all times, fully abide by international humanitarian law and respect human rights.

We welcome yesterday's announcement that Israel will soon open humanitarian corridors in Gaza. That is a first step that must be immediately complemented by other measures. Meanwhile, we reiterate that targeting civilian populations — through rocket firings; military action likely to cause harm to innocent civilians, especially women and children; or any other means — is unacceptable. The deaths of civilians caused by Israeli military action in the vicinity of United Nations schools in Gaza in recent days are a tragic illustration of the intolerable perils of the current situation.

Halting violence is also key to allowing the peace process to be resumed in earnest and as promptly as possible. Negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian National Authority and the needed internal reconciliation among Palestinians cannot make progress while Gaza burns and its residents, as well as those of southern Israel, fear for their lives. Likewise, the negotiating process does not stand a true chance if all parties are not clearly and forcefully reminded that the international community considers a just and comprehensive settlement to be the only realistic and acceptable way forward. Only the Security Council can credibly convey that message.

Once calm is restored, the Council must assist the peace process more decisively, without prejudice to the valuable role of individual Member States, groups of Member States or other organizations. At each juncture, the Council must determine the most appropriate way to best contribute to a peaceful solution to the conflict. Now is the time to act, including through the implementation of resolution 1850 (2008), by which this organ commits the international community to a number of goals. Among them are the irreversibility of negotiations; the fulfilment of obligations under the Quartet Road Map, as stated in the Annapolis Joint Understanding; refraining from any steps that could undermine confidence or prejudice the outcome of negotiations; and the intensification of efforts aimed at the mutual recognition and peaceful coexistence of all States in the region. All those objectives have been thwarted by recent events and their tragic repercussions. As several delegations stated in the meeting held on 16 December (see S/PV.6045), resolution 1850 (2008) put the Council to a difficult test. It must succeed.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on the representative of the Czech Republic.

Mr. Palouš (Czech Republic): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The candidate country Croatia; the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia; and the European Free Trade Association country Liechtenstein, member of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, align themselves with this statement.

The European Union is deeply concerned over the ongoing fighting, the plight of civilians in and around Gaza and the suffering and anguish of the entire civilian population in the region. We deplore the ongoing hostilities, which have caused high numbers of civilian casualties, and we wish to express our sincere condolences to the families of the Palestinian and Israeli victims. We are profoundly disturbed by the losses of civilian lives at the United Nations school in Jabaliya as a result of Israeli military action.

The European Union is determined to make every effort to help stop the current violence and repeats its call for an immediate cessation of military action on both sides. There must be an unconditional halt to rocket attacks by Hamas on Israel and an end to Israeli military action.

The European Union urges the parties to fully respect their obligations under international humanitarian law. The European Union recalls that no military solution can prevail in Gaza and calls for the establishment of a lasting truce. The European Union welcomes the initiative of Presidents Mubarak and Sarkozy and follows with hope the latest developments in that direction.

The European Union also calls on the parties, in particular Israel, to grant immediate, unhindered and secure passage for the delivery of humanitarian aid to the inhabitants of the Gaza Strip. The European Union welcomes the three-hour halt of Israeli military operations and calls on Israel to open a humanitarian corridor in Gaza to allow humanitarian organizations free access to the territory. The European Union is also ready to step up its already substantial assistance for the improvement of the humanitarian situation of those in need.

The European Union fully supports the international efforts to find an immediate solution to the current crisis and takes an active part in these efforts. The foreign ministers of the States members of the European Union met in Paris on 30 December 2008 and put forward their proposals to resolve the crisis. Subsequently, a European ministerial delegation led by the European Union presidency, represented by Czech Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg, travelled to the region to seek an end to the violence, to alleviate the current distressing humanitarian situation and to discuss the European Union proposals agreed upon in Paris.

First, the current situation on the ground makes the need to reach an immediate and permanent ceasefire absolutely urgent. There must be an unconditional halt to rocket attacks by Hamas on Israel and an end to Israeli military action. The cessation of fighting should allow a lasting and normal opening of all border crossings, as provided for in the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access. The European Union is ready to re-dispatch the European Union Border Assistance Mission to Rafah to enable its reopening in cooperation with Egypt, the Palestinian Authority and Israel. It is also willing to examine the possibility of extending its assistance to other crossing points, provided that the issues relating to security have found a satisfactory response.

Secondly, immediate humanitarian action is required. Food, urgent medical supplies and fuel must be delivered to the Gaza Strip, the safe evacuation of the injured must be allowed and immediate access for humanitarian workers should be made possible through the opening of crossing points. The European Union dispatched a field mission to provide the most appropriate response as quickly as possible, in cooperation with the United Nations, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and non-governmental organizations.

Lastly, the European Union reiterates the need to step up the peace process. In this context, it welcomed the adoption of resolution 1850 (2008). We are convinced that there is no military solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in Gaza or elsewhere. The solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must be based on the process set out in Annapolis and in accordance with the terms of reference of the Madrid Conference, in particular land for peace, the relevant Security Council resolutions and the Quartet's Road Map. It must lead towards the establishment of an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State in the West Bank and Gaza existing side by side with Israel in peace and security.

In order to foster a lasting settlement, the European Union, while neither intervening in the negotiations nor prejudging their outcome, reiterates its willingness to assist in the implementation of a final peace agreement when the time comes. The European Union calls upon the parties to desist from any actions that threaten the viability of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement, in conformity with international law.

The European Union is fully aware of the responsibility of the international community, especially the Quartet. The European Union also reiterates the importance of the Arab partners' sustained, broad and constructive commitment. In this respect, it considers that the Arab Peace Initiative offers a solid and appropriate basis for peace in the Middle East to which all parties should give their consideration.

The European Union also encourages inter-Palestinian reconciliation behind President Mahmoud Abbas, commends the mediation efforts of Egypt and the Arab League in this respect, and is prepared to support any Government which respects the Palestine Liberation Organization's commitments, resolutely supports the peace negotiations with Israel and pursues policies and measures that reflect the Quartet's principles.

Finally, let me stress once again that the European Union is determined to assist alongside the other members of the Quartet and the region's States in ending violence and re-launching the peace process.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Argentina.

Mr. Argüello (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, I would like to express our gratitude for this opportunity for States non-members of the Security Council to express their views on the very serious situation in the Gaza Strip.

The recent developments in the Gaza Strip are alarming and once again show that the main victims of violence and military operations are innocent civilians, especially Palestinians. On the occasion of the beginning of the Israeli military operations in Gaza on 3 January, the Argentine Government condemned such operations and the disproportionate use of force by Israel, as well as the continuous rocket attacks by Palestinian groups against Israeli territory.

In spite of the reiterated calls on behalf of most of the international community, hostilities have intensified over the past few days, and yesterday saw the death of more than 40 civilians as a result of Israeli attacks against a school operated by the United Nations in the Gaza Strip. My country most vigorously condemns these attacks and believes that an independent international investigation should be established to determine responsibilities and to prevent such acts from being repeated. I would like to convey to the families of the victims of this conflict the sincere condolences of the Argentine Government and people.

The Israeli response after 27 December has been altogether excessive and disproportionate. Israel must fully respect its obligations in the framework of international humanitarian law and take all steps to protect the Palestinian civilian population. United Nations and other reports regarding the number of Palestinian civilians who have died as a result of Israeli bombing and land operations show that such steps have not been taken.

That is why my country feels that the immediate priority is to declare a ceasefire and to end violence and all military operations. The Israeli troops must withdraw from the Gaza Strip and attacks against Israeli territories much cease. The Israeli proposition to establish a ceasefire for a few hours is clearly an unacceptable response, since it cannot contribute in any way to resolving the grave and urgent humanitarian needs of the Palestinian civil population. What is needed at this hour is a permanent and unconditional end to all hostilities.

Taking into consideration that the parties alone are not capable of arriving to an agreement, the Security Council must assume its responsibilities and adopt a resolution in this regard. The Council avoids this obligation only at the risk of gravely damaging the credibility of the United Nations. My country supports the various efforts being made to establish conditions conducive to the adoption of a decision of this nature.

The humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip is alarming. Under the current conditions, international assistance cannot reach the affected population. If we do not act urgently in the short run, it may escalate to a major humanitarian crisis that could affect more than 1.5 million Palestinians.

Argentina is currently putting together a significant package of humanitarian assistance for Gaza. We are prepared to join our efforts with those of the rest of the international community. However, those efforts will be meaningless unless assistance immediately reaches the thousands of Palestinian men, women and children who are at this very moment suffering as a result of the violence. It is therefore urgent that a ceasefire be declared, so that humanitarian agencies can deploy on the ground and begin to work.

Finally, I would like to say that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been on the agenda of the Security Council for more than 60 years. The current crisis illustrates to us once again the urgency of achieving a lasting peace in the region that will lead to the establishment of a democratic, viable and contiguous Palestinian State living side by side with Israel in peace and security, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Argentina hopes that the Security Council will this time shoulder its responsibilities and contribute to immediately ending hostilities and to establishing the conditions necessary to achieve peace, so as to benefit all the peoples living in the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Natalegawa (Indonesia): For nearly two weeks now, the Israeli military onslaught against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip has raged unabated. Just yesterday we witnessed a new low, with news of Israeli strikes against schools operated by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the

Near East. Innocent civilians, including women and children seeking refuge, have fallen victim. Once again, Indonesia condemns, in the strongest manner possible, Israeli military attacks against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, which are in contravention of international humanitarian and human rights law.

It is a measure of the gravity of the situation that the Security Council yesterday heard directly from the principals concerned. We appreciate very much the presence and statements of President Mahmoud Abbas, Foreign Ministers of Security Council members, Foreign Ministers of members of the League of Arab States and the Secretary General of the Arab League himself. Indeed, we are cognizant of, and encouraged by, the various ongoing intensive diplomatic efforts to bring the fighting to an end. Indonesia is particularly mindful of the strong efforts being made by the Secretary-General in concert with regional countries. The role of countries in the region, individually or collectively through the League of Arab States, in promoting peace in the region has been particularly pivotal.

Such intensive diplomatic efforts accentuate one glaring fact: the continued lack of a formal and unified Council position. Far from building on the common position reached in the press statement by its President on 28 December 2008, the Security Council has thus far been unable to pursue stronger measures to end all violence and military activities and to restore the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip.

Of course, we are only too aware of the painstaking process of diplomatic negotiations and the need to formulate a finely crafted and balanced resolution. However, when the situation on the ground continues to deteriorate and innocent civilians continue to fall victim, the price of delay is immeasurable. Indonesia calls on the Council to issue without delay a crystal-clear and simple message: end the fighting. The cycle of violence must be reversed. The victims must be assisted. And the peace process must be revived. Indeed, beyond the death and destruction that the Israeli military operations have wrought, the peace process itself is also ultimately at risk. We believe that a credible and permanent ceasefire, with the requisite international mechanism, must be immediately established.

Similarly urgent is the lifting of the closures of the Gaza crossings and the provision of humanitarian access in a continuous and permanent manner. My delegation calls for unhindered access to the Gaza Strip by persons, including humanitarian workers, and essential supplies. Palestine cannot go it alone in responding to the humanitarian challenges in the Gaza Strip. Hence, the continued provision of emergency and humanitarian assistance by the international community to the Palestinian people in Gaza remains critical.

We cannot ignore the fact that Israel has not responded to the Security Council's call in its statement of 28 December 2008. A situation of such magnitude in the Middle East warrants a serious and swift response from the Council. It is therefore our fervent hope that Council will be able to assume its responsibility by taking a firm and formal decision.

We believe that, should the Council remain unable to act, alternative avenues for action within the United Nations system should, with the support of the parties directly affected, be sought, including the General Assembly, by invoking the Uniting for Peace resolution — General Assembly resolution 377 (V).

The Charter of the United Nations clearly outlines that maintaining peace and security is one of the purposes of the Organization. At this critical juncture, we are called upon to live up to that goal, to spare no effort to bring the violence in Gaza to and end and to bring about a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Amil (Pakistan): I take the floor to express our grave concern over the prevailing situation in the Gaza Strip and to reiterate our solidarity with the Palestinian people. Pakistan shares their pain and suffering in these exceptionally trying circumstances.

The besieged populations of Gaza, who were originally dispossessed and driven from their own homes by the Israeli occupation, are being tormented once again by a brutal military campaign by the occupying Power. For 12 days now, the international community has witnessed in shock and horror the unimaginable human tragedy and grave humanitarian crisis that have unfolded in Gaza as a result of the callous, excessive and indiscriminate use of force by Israel.

The killing of any civilian on either side is unacceptable. We have called for an end to the firing of rockets on Israel. Those actions do not serve the Palestinian cause in any way. However, attempts to justify the overwhelming force and massively disproportionate response by Israel to those rockets are misplaced. Such attempts seem to try to mask the origins of the conflict, the root cause — that is, the occupation, human rights violations and the collective punishment of the Palestinian people — and the obvious frustration of an oppressed and deprived population languishing under the stranglehold and blockades of the occupying Power.

The colossal scale of death and destruction caused by this campaign of terror especially targeted against civilians and the infrastructure in Gaza has been widely reported and documented by the international media, human rights and humanitarian organizations and the United Nations. Nothing has been spared — homes, civilian facilities, places of worship, civilian shelters and even United Nations schools. Indeed, in this precision targeting and so-called smart bombing, among the hundreds martyred and the thousands injured are scores of women and children. Those actions cannot be justified under any pretext whatsoever. They are in flagrant violation of international law and of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. There should be accountability for these violations.

Together with the entire international community, the Government and the people of Pakistan have strongly condemned this aggression and the spilling of innocent blood in Gaza. We have appealed for the cessation of hostilities and violence and support all efforts to that end. We believe that the use of force not only contravenes international principles and norms; it is also counterproductive, as past experience has proved. The failure to stop the aggression will only perpetuate the cycle of violence and foment desperation, anger and extremism. We take note of the reprieve in attacks, and we sincerely hope that it becomes permanent. The resumption of attacks, with the resultant civilian casualties, however, is not acceptable.

From the broader perspective, we are seriously concerned that the deteriorating situation in Gaza as a result of the Israeli attacks could lead to an escalation of tensions in the region and undermine the efforts for promoting a peaceful, just and durable settlement of the question of Palestine, which is the key to achieving a comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

The crisis in Gaza requires an urgent, collective and effective response from the international community. It cannot wait while innocent people continue to be killed. In accordance with its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, the Security Council was expected to galvanize and lead such a response. Yet the Council has once again failed to act. To be truthful, it has not been allowed to act. It has failed to recognize the international condemnation of the situation in Gaza. It has been unable to capitalize on the worldwide backing for an immediate ceasefire and to support the numerous ongoing efforts by regional and international partners to secure peace. It has failed to reciprocate the sincere and constructive approach and proposals by the Arab Group, whose high-level delegation is currently with us.

Under the circumstances, the silence and the inaction of the Council are inexplicable and are a further blow to its already questioned credibility and legitimacy — a point that was repeatedly raised by many delegations in the debate yesterday. Ironically, this foot-dragging by the Council comes in the wake of its own much-touted resolution 1850 (2008), adopted recently, on 16 December 2008. While noting the shortcomings of that resolution, we had nevertheless hoped that serious and sincere efforts would be undertaken to realize the underlying commitment for peace embodied in it. We believe the Council must stand firmly behind its call on the parties to fulfil their obligations and to refrain from any steps that could undermine confidence or prejudice the outcome of the negotiations. The Council must stop the Israeli aggression in order to contribute to an atmosphere conducive to peace and negotiations.

We support the calls for the Council to adopt, without further delay, a resolution that should compel Israel to immediately stop its aggression, demand an immediate and permanent ceasefire and its full respect by both parties, provide for a complete lifting of the siege of Gaza and opening of the border crossings, ensure unhindered and safe access and conditions for humanitarian work, establish a mechanism to ensure the protection of the civilian population and the monitoring of the ceasefire, and promote intra-Palestinian unity and reconciliation.

In that regard, we support the draft resolution submitted by Libya on behalf of the Arab Group, which is also consistent with the final communiqué of the extraordinary meeting of the Executive Committee of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) at the level of foreign ministers, held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on 3 January 2009.

We would also like to note that, in coordination with the Arab Group, the African Group and the Non-Aligned Movement, the OIC Group in Geneva has requested a special session of the Human Rights Council on 9 January to address the grave violations of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories, including the aggression on the occupied Gaza Strip.

Together with these steps, the international community must rededicate its attention and redouble its efforts towards the larger objective of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East and the resolution of the Palestinian question on the basis of international law and the full implementation of the relevant United Nations resolutions and agreements, the obligations of the parties and the framework provided by the Madrid terms of reference, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative.

We would like to conclude by reiterating Pakistan's steadfast and complete support for the achievement of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to exercise self-determination and sovereignty in their independent, viable State of Palestine, on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, His Excellency Mr. Paul Badji.

Mr. Badji (*spoke in French*): Allow me first to congratulate you, Mr. President, on France's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council in this first month of 2009. I am certain that, thanks to your mastery of the procedures of and issues before this important body, the Council's work will be fruitful. I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to Ambassador Neven Jurica, the Permanent Representative of Croatia, for the excellent way in which he steered the work of the Council over the past month.

I am grateful to you, Sir, and to the other members of the Council for having given me the opportunity to take part, as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, in this discussion of the serious situation in Gaza due to the brutal, deliberate and unrelenting military attack launched by Israel 12 days ago.

The Committee most vigorously condemns this military attack and the destruction perpetrated by Israel in the Gaza Strip, which have killed more than 600 Palestinians and wounded thousands of others, mostly innocent civilians. The Committee demands that Israel cease immediately and without condition its deadly military campaign against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip. Israel must be held responsible for the murders and wounding of innocent unarmed civilians, including women and children, which is a flagrant violation of the principles of international law. The Committee also demands that Israel immediately open the border crossings with Gaza in order to allow emergency medical assistance to be delivered along with other essential goods for the Palestinian people, who desperately need them.

The blockade, which has strangled the Gaza Strip over the past year, has already sparked humanitarian disaster. The Committee underscores that the Fourth Geneva Convention requires occupying Powers to protect the civilians who are living under their occupation, in particular by providing them with essential services such as food and medicine.

The Committee has always opposed and has continually condemned the rocket attacks launched by Palestinian groups into Israeli territory. The Committee once again calls for an immediate end to these rocket attacks, which give Israel a pretext for its military attacks against the Gaza Strip, although it is totally unacceptable that the population of the Gaza Strip in its entirety be collectively punished for attacks perpetrated by groups or individuals.

The Committee reminds the Israeli Government that the Conference of High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention many times affirmed that the Convention applied to the occupied Palestinian territories. That was then reiterated by the General Assembly and the Security Council. The Gaza Strip continues to be an occupied territory by the very fact that Israel controls the daily life of the Palestinian population, down to the smallest details. The international community needs to take immediate

action to put an end to what is a flagrant violation of this important international instrument. Specifically, the Committee urges the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to immediately take decisive measures in order to meet their commitments taken under article 1, that is, to comply with and ensure compliance with the Convention under all circumstances.

The Committee believes that the entire international community is responsible for ending the carnage. Given the gravity of the situation, the Committee believes that the Security Council must shoulder its responsibilities under the United Nations Charter and do its utmost to end the crisis by immediately taking specific and effective measures to protect the civilian population. To that end, the Committee believes that the Council must cooperate closely with the parties and all actors involved, in particular the Quartet and the regional partners. Such an effort would help to prevent further victims and to calm the situation on the ground. An immediate and permanent ceasefire should be followed up forthwith by measures aimed at finding a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the framework of the ongoing negotiations and at establishing a viable Palestinian State living in peace and security alongside Israel.

The President (*spoke in French*): I call on the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Al Habib (Islamic Republic of Iran): I wish to begin by thanking you, Sir, for having convened this meeting at this difficult juncture and by wishing you success in your presidency of the Security Council this month.

As many speakers have mentioned yesterday and today, despite the enormous anger and worldwide anguish shown by the international community, the abhorrent carnage and the crimes against humanity committed by the Zionist regime against the innocent Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip are continuing unabated, and every day we witness a new face of this vicious aggression and crime. As a result of this atrocity, hundreds of civilians have been cold-bloodedly massacred in Gaza and thousands wounded, most of them women and children.

The world community is witnessing with outrage and anguish the perpetration of some of the most blatant examples of crimes against humanity and genocide committed by an irresponsible and brutal regime that knows no boundaries in violating the most basic principles of international law, international humanitarian law and human rights law. It would seem as if the life of that criminal regime depends on creating and perpetuating bloodshed, and as if it feeds on nothing but war crimes, aggression, occupation and State terrorism.

The people of Gaza continue to be subjected to untold sufferings that are unprecedented in the recent history of humankind. It is appalling that, in the twenty-first century, the civilized world should witness an entire population under crippling blockade, starved, deprived of the most basic supplies, including bread and drinking water, and slaughtered in the most horrendous ways, having been left with nowhere to go, nothing to eat and no safe place to take shelter. Even the places that the United Nations has provided for this innocent people to escape Israeli brutalities are savagely attacked, as the world saw in yesterday's Israeli attack on schools run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, killing more than 40 people, many of them children.

The Israeli regime is targeting every human being, every house and every infrastructure in Gaza. It is actually targeting every value that the civilized world stands for and every principle of international law that is dear to the world community. Mosques, hospitals, schools, United Nations buildings, medicine and food stores, and even the farms and private houses of the people are callously bombarded and women, men and children slaughtered in their beds, in their homes and everywhere on the streets. To cover up all these crimes, the media is not allowed access to the area by the Israeli regime to cover the tragic developments in the Gaza Strip.

This savagery should be stopped and it should be stopped immediately. The Israeli war machine must be stopped from shattering more lives and livelihoods, and the Israeli war criminals should be brought to justice for the crimes they have perpetrated, and continue to perpetrate, and for the outrageous and brutal pain and torment they have inflicted and continue to inflict on the innocent people in Gaza.

As mentioned by some speakers yesterday, a whole population is being massacred only because it resists occupation and State terrorism and simply

because it has exercised its right to vote, which is the most basic principle of democracy.

The credibility of the international community and of the United Nations is at stake and has been challenged once again by the Israeli regime's war crimes and crimes against humanity. It is long overdue for the Security Council to live up to its responsibilities to stop these atrocities. The Security Council must take urgent and effective measures to stop this carnage and to help ease the sufferings of the people in the Gaza Strip. Every minute matters, since each entails more crimes by the Israelis and more losses for the innocent Palestinians. The Council must act and it must act now.

The Security Council should adopt a binding resolution calling for an immediate end to the Israeli attacks and aggression against the innocent Palestinian people in Gaza; immediate Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and the lifting of the blockade; the opening of the crossings and the urgent provision of humanitarian assistance to the people there. The international community must hold that regime accountable for its crimes and for the damages it has inflicted on the defenceless Palestinians, and should mobilize its efforts and resources to reconstruct the infrastructure in Gaza.

The stalling tactics of some permanent members to obstruct any action by the Security Council and to render the Council incapacitated are neither acceptable nor justifiable, and are tantamount to complicity in the Israeli crimes against the Palestinian people. The Security Council must be allowed to take action and to stop this unbridled State terrorism. Indeed, if the Security Council continues to fail to discharge its responsibility to stop the carnage, the Member States are fully ready to ask the General Assembly to take up the issue on the basis of its resolution 377 (V) — the "Uniting for Peace" resolution.

I do not wish to take the valuable time of the Council to address the absurd statement made by the Israeli representative in the Council yesterday, in which certain baseless allegations were raised against my country. Suffice it to stress that these are despicable tactics that seek to distract attention from Israeli crimes at a time when the whole world is united to counter those crimes. These unworthy tactics have not worked in the past and will not work in the future.

The President (*spoke in French*): I call on the representative of Nicaragua.

Mr. Hermida Castillo (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is with deep sadness and grief that the people of Nicaragua have learned the news of the tragedy being experienced once again by our brothers, the Palestinian people.

Six hundred and sixty people have been killed and more than 3,000 injured as a result of the latest Israeli aggression against the occupied Palestinian territories. For more than 12 days now, the heroic Palestinian people have been the victims of bombardments by air, sea and land that constitute a massacre of the Palestinian civilian population.

Yet again, history is repeating itself; regrettably, that appears to be happening with respect to the question of Palestine, whose population is suffering under persecution and systematic genocide. The wall that separates that population from its neighbours isolates them, forces them to live in misery and denies them the right to a homeland of their own. Regrettably, it is the descendants of those who had been declared stateless, who were the victims of Nazi persecution and genocide and who were forced to live in ghettoes who are now victimizing the Palestinian people.

But while the Jewish Holocaust ended with the end of the Second World War and while the Jewish people were given a State and territory, the Government of Israel's excessive campaign of destruction has continued for more than 60 years. This has denied the Palestinian people — the age-old inhabitants of historic Palestine — the right to an independent homeland. Thus far, the two-State solution remains a solution on paper only.

The situation in Gaza is tragic. The attacks that took place yesterday — the day of the Three Kings, a very important day for children — on three schools protected by the United Nations flag, claiming more than 43 lives and injuring more than 100 people, was a further Israeli scorn for human rights, for the right to life, for international law, for the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War and for the United Nations. It is a clear example of the tragedy that the people of Palestine are enduring.

Many humanitarian organizations have condemned the humanitarian crisis throughout the 362 square kilometres of the Palestinian territory of Gaza, whose 1.5 million inhabitants have been living in misery owing to the blockade imposed by Israel. The

Israeli military attacks have caused additional shortages of basic food, medical supplies, drinking water and fuel, as well as electricity cuts, because assistance cannot be delivered.

This is a horrible tragedy. People continue to arrive at hospitals; the number of injured continues to rise. The director of Gaza operations for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, John Ging, has called the situation incredible.

For its part, my Government regrets the fact that the Security Council has not yet been able to reach any outcome while we see the number of victims of the barbaric Israeli attacks continue to rise. In that connection, we support the statement issued by the Coordinating Bureau of the Non-Aligned Movement, which expresses deep disappointment at the inability of the Security Council to uphold its responsibilities in maintaining international peace and security, and notes that, despite more than 12 days of sustained military attacks that have gravely affected the civilian population and heightened instability and tensions in the region, the Council has regrettably been unable to take any concrete measure to end the aggression.

The Security Council has the legal and moral obligation to take all measures necessary to bring an immediate end to the aggression against the Palestinian people. Nicaragua rejects that aggression and condemns in the strongest terms the extermination practiced by Israel, the occupying Power, in the occupied Palestinian territories. The current hostilities are further destabilizing the situation in the occupied territories and throughout the Middle East and are making it ever more difficult to achieve a lasting solution to the Palestinian problem.

The Security Council must compel Israel to put an immediate end to its military operations and to open all border crossings in order to guarantee unhindered access to the area for humanitarian assistance.

Any decision to be adopted must not only lead to a lasting solution, but must also guarantee that hostilities will not resume. Any decision must respect all relevant international resolutions. There can be no military solution to the Palestinian problem. We support a peaceful negotiated resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the right of the Palestinian people to sovereignty and self-determination in an independent Palestinian State, on the basis of the 1967 borders and with Jerusalem as its capital. Only in that way cam we have lasting peace in the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in French*): I call now on the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Mr. Escalona Ojeda (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank you, Mr. President, for giving all countries the opportunity to address the Security Council in this open debate.

On behalf of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, I wish to express our firmest condemnation of the genocide that the State of Israel is carrying out in Gaza and to affirm our unconditional solidarity with the Palestinian people. We are witnessing one of the darkest facets of modern war: the punishment of a civilian population in order to demolish its morale, destroy its spirit of resistance, to crush all will to struggle and to make people believe that benign slavery is preferable to resistance in the quest for freedom. In that context, the destruction of Hamas — which, of course, is among the objectives here — would be a collateral effect.

The State of Israel continues to sow the wind, and it will reap the whirlwind. No tyrant has ever been able to drain a people's last drop of blood: before that happens, peoples have risen up and have triumphed. That is what took place with the resistance against Nazi fascism during the Second World War — which, it appears, has been forgotten.

Every cluster bomb of depleted uranium or white phosphorus — whose use is a war crime — sows not only death, but also a hatred that will become part of people's genetic code, generation after generation. Israel is creating millions of suicidal human beings, who will proliferate throughout the world. Then, neither Israelis nor anyone else will have peace. That is not the path we are seeking. The Israelis lost the war in Lebanon in 2006; they are not invincible. A Nuremberg tribunal will be awaiting them in the future in order to judge them as war criminals.

With the permission of the Council, I shall read out a communiqué issued yesterday afternoon by the Government of Venezuela:

> "The Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, along with the peoples of the world, is once again witnessing the horror of

the death of innocent children and women resulting from the invasion of the Gaza Strip by Israeli troops, and the merciless bombing by air and land systematically carried out by the State of Israel on Palestinian territory.

"In this tragic hour of outrage, the people of Venezuela express their unreserved solidarity with the heroic Palestinian people, share in the grief of thousands of families at the loss of their loved ones and extends their hand to them, affirming that the Government of Venezuela will work tirelessly to see those responsible for these atrocious crimes severely punished.

"The Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela categorically condemns the flagrant violations of international law carried out by the State of Israel and denounces its planned use of State terrorism, by which that country has placed itself at the margins of the community of nations.

"For these reasons, the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has decided to expel the Ambassador of Israel and some of the personnel of the Embassy of Israel in Venezuela, reaffirming its vocation for peace and its demand that international law be respected. The Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has instructed its Mission to the United Nations, along with the majority of Governments calling for the same thing, to pressure the Security Council to apply urgent and necessary measures to stop the invasion by the State of Israel against Palestinian territory.

"President Hugo Chavez, who has met with senior representatives of the World Jewish Congress and has always been opposed to anti-Semitism and to any type of discrimination and racism, has made a fraternal appeal to the Jewish people around the world to oppose these criminal policies of the State of Israel, which recall the worst chapters of the twentieth century. With the genocide of the Palestinian people, the State of Israel can never offer its people the prospect of a necessary and lasting peace."

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Iceland.

Mr. Hreggvidsson (Iceland): The situation in Gaza is unacceptable. In the three weeks since the end of the six-month ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, hundreds of civilians, including many women and children, have died in military actions and thousands have been injured.

My country has condemned the killings of civilians and aligns itself with the Secretary-General of the United Nations and with those Member States that have called upon Israel to immediately stop its military actions in that densely populated area. Iceland has also condemned the firing of rockets from Gaza to terrorize Israeli civilians. Hamas bears a heavy responsibility for drawing civilians into the conflict zone. However, Israel's actions in Gaza in the past two weeks are both disproportionate and clearly contrary to international humanitarian law.

The immediate imperative is the suspension of all violence by all parties. It will then be essential for Israel to lift its blockade on Gaza so that humanitarian aid can immediately be given access to Gaza.

The peace process must recommence with the active involvement of the international community. Iceland renews its call for the better inclusion of women in the peace process, in accordance with Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). In that regard, as it did in December, Iceland calls the attention of the Council to the International Women's Commission for a Just and Sustainable Palestinian-Israeli Peace (IWC) — a tripartite body involving Israelis, Palestinians and prominent international women leaders. The solidarity among these women across the lines of conflict can offer inspiration and hope for their societies as a whole.

The Security Council is the international body responsible for maintaining international peace and security. The situation in Gaza demands a concerted effort by the Council to bring an end to the bloodshed and put forward a plan on how to further the goal of ending the occupation and achieving a two-State solution, which is a prerequisite for durable peace.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Australia.

Mr. Hill (Australia): Thank you, Mr. President, for the opportunity to contribute briefly to this very important debate. Australia has been deeply disturbed by the continuing violence in Gaza and southern Israel.

The escalation of the conflict underlines the urgency of diplomatic efforts to find a resolution. Australia supports the actions of the United Nations in seeking to bring about an immediate ceasefire.

Australia continues to believe that a resolution to the current situation must bring a halt to rocket attacks against Israel by Hamas, an end to arms shipments into the Gaza Strip and the opening of the border crossings into the Gaza Strip. Furthermore, any diplomatic solution must form part of a longer-term compact involving Israel and Palestine, based on a two-State solution to the Israel-Palestinian issue. Australia welcomes the active role of Egypt and France in working towards a diplomatic resolution to the conflict.

Australia is gravely concerned by the humanitarian implications of this conflict and notes that its expansion also exacerbated what was already a grave situation in the Gaza Strip. It is critical that Israel meet its obligations under international humanitarian law to the people of the Gaza Strip, ensuring that they have access to basic goods, food, medical supplies and humanitarian assistance. Australia welcomes Israel's announcement that it is establishing improved conditions for aid to flow into the Gaza Strip.

Australia has been a long-time provider of assistance to the Palestinian people, doubling its assistance in 2008 to $45 million. On 1 January of this year Australia announced an immediate commitment of $5 million in additional assistance to the people of the Gaza Strip. This assistance will go towards providing emergency food and medical supplies, as well as cash assistance to conflict-affected families. Australia stands ready to provide further assistance as required.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Ecuador.

Ms. Espinosa (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): As a founding Member of the United Nations, Ecuador advocates a peaceful solution to international conflicts and disputes and emphatically rejects the threat or use of force as a mechanism to resolve them. Unfortunately, in recent days my country, like the entire international community, has seen the occupying Power resorting once again to violence instead of dialogue and subjecting the civilian population to death and despair. Ecuador considers the military offensive carried out by the Israeli army in Gaza unacceptable and disproportionate.

On behalf of the President of the Republic, Rafael Correa Delgado, I would like to express the deep condolences of the Government and people of Ecuador at the deaths of hundreds of civilians, especially children, who have been victims of the military activities.

We associate ourselves with the many statements by different Governments, and with the calls for an immediate ceasefire as an initial measure that would make it possible to reach a peaceful, negotiated solution to the conflict. It is imperative that the international community, through this Organization and its Security Council, adopt the measures set out in the United Nations Charter with a view to guaranteeing full respect for human rights and international humanitarian law in the conflict area.

In that respect, my Government believes it is urgent to open all the recognized border crossings into and out of the Gaza Strip so that the Palestinian population can have access to humanitarian assistance, including food and medicine, in order to prevent a worsening of the current emergency humanitarian situation, extreme vulnerability and famine. Ecuador would like to particularly express its support and gratitude to the United Nations agencies and to all governmental and non-governmental organizations that continue to provide assistance to the civilian population and asks them to remain vigilant until peace is re-established in that area.

Ecuador believes that any comprehensive solution that would make it possible to establish a lasting peace in the Middle East cannot be a military one. It must be political and be carried out in full compliance with Security Council resolutions, but above all with the ongoing commitment to the recognition of and respect for international law and with a constructive dialogue that would promote the future development of its peoples.

In that respect, my country reiterates its call to the members of the Security Council to adopt all measures necessary for an immediate cessation of hostilities, a solution to the humanitarian crisis and, in particular, a lasting solution and a durable peace in the region. For Ecuador, a durable peace naturally includes the right of the Palestinian people to exercise self-determination and to have a contiguous territory and an independent State.

Once again, we call on the Security Council to act steadfastly and decisively. International public opinion is awaiting a strong response from the United Nations. A failure to respond would call into question the legitimacy and effectiveness of this organ of the United Nations system.

However, we also believe that the responsibility of the Security Council does not exclude action by the other organs of the United Nations, such as the General Assembly, in accordance with the provisions of the Charter.

Along those lines, Ecuador would also like to support the initiative to convene a special meeting of the Human Rights Council to identify human rights violations made during the recent attacks.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Bolivia.

Mr. Siles Alvarado (Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): The catastrophic humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip is keeping the whole international community in a state of disquiet owing to the disproportionate military action being carried out by Israel. The Government and the people of Bolivia condemn and categorically express their rejection of that aggression, which is claiming innocent human lives, particularly children's, from whom the most sacred of human rights, the right to life, is being snatched. The current situation in the Gaza Strip is one of pain, bitterness and despair.

Israel's actions once again clearly show its flagrant violation of international humanitarian law, international law, the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the human rights conventions. Added to that is the serious impact on humanitarian issues, which hour by hour are making it more difficult to meet even the basic needs of the Palestinian people. Is it possible to view this acute humanitarian crisis with indifference?

The credibility of the Security Council is once again being called into question by international public opinion. Therefore, within the framework of its jurisdiction, the Council must provide a strong response with the adoption of a binding resolution that would reopen the way for peace and put an immediate end to all acts of violence, which are only aggravating the crisis. There must be no further loss of human life owing to the occupying Power's occupation of the occupied Palestinian territories, which is at the very root of the crisis.

It is important to renew the peace process with a constructive and creative dialogue for the benefit of the region. In that regard, no efforts or initiatives should be spared to that end within the framework of the resolutions adopted by the Security Council and with a view to the recognition of an independent Palestinian State. Military action is not the way to build a lasting peaceful solution.

The Government and the people of Bolivia fervently appeal for the border crossings to be reopened, to enable humanitarian aid to be delivered to the Palestinian people, who have our full solidarity. Finally, I should like to state that Bolivia fully supports the statement made by the representative of Cuba on behalf of the countries of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Paraguay.

Mr. Buffa (Paraguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is an honour for me to make this statement on behalf of the States members of the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR) and associated States — Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela and my country, Paraguay.

The States members of MERCOSUR and associated States express their gratitude to the Security Council for the timely and necessary convening of this open debate to hear the viewpoints and appeals of Member States on the regrettable situation in the Gaza Strip. Similarly, as they publicly stated at the beginning of this conflict, they would like to reiterate before this body their deep concern at the current tragic situation in the Gaza Strip, whose high toll in loss of civilian life and casualties is regrettable.

The States members of MERCOSUR and associated States condemn Israel's land incursion into the Gaza Strip and that country's disproportionate use of force. Similarly, they reiterate their condemnation of the launching of rockets by Palestinian groups against Israeli territory.

In that context, the States members of MERCOSUR and associated States also vehemently condemn the Israeli attacks against schools operated by the United Nations in the Gaza Strip, as a result of which over 40 innocent civilians have died. The States members of MERCOSUR and associated States extend their most heartfelt condolences to all family members of the victims of that conflict.

Amid this regrettable situation, we join the whole international community in calling for an immediate cessation of all hostilities. We urge both parties to resume the dialogue interrupted by the violence, so as to achieve the complete restoration of peace in the region, which does not deserve to live constantly punished by violence.

The States members of MERCOSUR and associated States want that dialogue to contribute to achieving a peaceful and lasting solution to the conflict, with strict adherence to international law and the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and full respect for human rights and international humanitarian law.

The Security Council is the United Nations organ with the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. For that reason, we urge the Council, which acts through the mandate of Member States, not to remain indifferent to its responsibility and to adopt urgent and categorical measures to remedy this appalling situation.

Similarly, we request the international community and the parties to the conflict to guarantee, for humanitarian reasons, the permanent reopening of border crossings with Gaza to ensure the provision of food, supplies and medicines, facilitating the evacuation of the wounded and free access for humanitarian assistance, in coordination with the United Nations, to help alleviate the precarious humanitarian situation in Gaza.

Lastly, we appeal for a continued belief in the peace. We support all constructive efforts aimed at bringing an immediate end to the violence and call for the resumption of peace negotiations between the parties involved as soon as possible, so as to establish an independent Palestinian State, living side by side with Israel, which would create the necessary stability in the region.

The President (*spoke in French*): There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 12.50 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.6062

Security Council

Sixty-fourth year

Provisional

6062nd meeting

Thursday, 8 January 2009, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Lacroix	(France)
Members:	Austria	Mr. Mayr-Harting
	Burkina Faso	Mr. Tiendrébéogo
	China	Ms. Zhang Dan
	Costa Rica	Mr. Urbina
	Croatia	Mr. Vilović
	Japan	Mr. Takasu
	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	Mr. Dabbashi
	Mexico	Mr. Heller
	Russian Federation	Mr. Rogachev
	Turkey	Mr. İlkin
	Uganda	Mr. Butagira
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mr. McMahan
	Viet Nam	Mr. Bui The Giang

Agenda

Briefing by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A.

09-20310 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Briefing by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, and in the absence of objection, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. António Guterres, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

It is so decided.

I invite Mr. Guterres to take a seat at the Council table.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Mr. António Guterres, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, whom I welcome on behalf of the members of the Council and to whom I now give the floor.

Mr. Guterres (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to express my gratitude for this opportunity to address the Security Council.

On a personal note, Sir, allow me to congratulate you on France's assuming the presidency of the Council at the beginning of the year. The excellent cooperation between France and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is robust and proved to be particularly fruitful during the recent French presidency of the European Union.

(*spoke in English*)

Allow me to switch into English.

Allow me also to salute the presence of the five newly elected Security Council members — Austria, Japan, Mexico, Turkey and Uganda. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) enjoys a long-standing and positive relationship with all of those countries, but I would particularly like to express my appreciation to Uganda for agreeing to host a special summit on forced displacement in Africa. At that summit next April, African heads of State will consider a new African Union Convention on Protection and Assistance for Internally Displaced Persons. If adopted, as we all hope, the Convention will be the first legally binding international instrument specifically related to internal displacement. It will also signify African leadership on a matter of truly global concern.

In January 2006, I informed the Council that the number of refugees was at its lowest level for almost a quarter of a century. Unfortunately, despite large-scale repatriation movements, the following two years saw a significant increase in refugee numbers, primarily due to the situations in Iraq and Somalia. While we are still compiling the latest statistics, our current estimate is that the total number of refugees under the mandate of my Office currently exceeds 11 million. That does not include the 4.6 million Palestinians for whom the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has responsibility.

The number of conflict-induced internally displaced persons has also grown and is now more than 26 million worldwide. While States have primary responsibility for the protection and welfare of displaced citizens, some lack the capacity, or even the will, to exercise it. Wherever possible, UNHCR therefore works in collaboration with the broader humanitarian community in the context of the so-called cluster approach to support States in providing the internally displaced with protection, assistance and solutions.

Another issue high on the UNHCR agenda is statelessness. In countries with reliable data, at least 3 million women, children and men are known to be stateless. However, the global number may be as high as 12 million.

In my briefing today, I will first comment on recent trends in forced displacement. I will then outline three important challenges encountered by my Office for which the role of the Security Council is highly relevant. And in conclusion, I will make a few comments on the issue of resolving situations of forced displacement.

Inasmuch as forced displacement arises from persecution and serious human rights violations, it is also often the result of threats to or breaches of

international peace and security. At the same time, neglected displacement scenarios can represent a threat to peace and security. As such, situations of which the Security Council is seized are often those where UNHCR is deeply engaged.

In today's world, I can perceive two groups of conflicts. The first extends from South and South-West Asia, through the Middle East to Sudan and Chad and into the Horn of Africa. From Peshawar to Kandahar, from Mosul to Gaza and from El Geneina to Mogadishu, we are confronted with a series of distinct crises, each with its own historical roots. But even so, those conflicts are now increasingly interrelated and together have major implications for global peace and security, drawing the serious attention of the international community.

Those conflicts are at the centre of many of today's humanitarian disasters and have generated around two thirds of the total number of refugees worldwide. They require a strong humanitarian response. While it is absolutely vital that the victims of armed conflict be provided with essential protection and assistance, we must also acknowledge the limitations of humanitarian action and its inability to resolve deep-rooted conflicts within and between States. The solution, as always, can only be political, and the contribution of the United Nations to resolving those conflicts in an effective and equitable manner is crucial to the credibility of the Organization, in particular among certain segments of international public opinion.

Let me now go into a little more detail. In Afghanistan, intensified conflict, coupled with the deliberate targeting of humanitarian workers, has limited humanitarian access to around half of the country's territory. Even so, in 2008, 278,000 Afghans returned to their homeland, mainly from Pakistan, with our support.

In reality, that significant number of returns was in not due to a meaningful improvement of the situation in Afghanistan. On the contrary, most of those who repatriated did so because of growing insecurity in the neighbouring areas of Pakistan and declining living standards for refugees in urban centres as a result of the economic crisis. In fact, violence, weak governance and development gaps in Afghanistan contribute to a situation in which 3 million of the country's citizens remain in exile in Pakistan and Iran.

We are now witnessing a new dimension to the crisis in the region, namely, the displacement of some 300,000 people in Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province and Federally Administered Tribal Areas. As in Afghanistan, UNHCR has very limited access, with serious constraints on the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

These developments have confirmed that the Afghan situation cannot be understood or addressed in isolation. Accordingly, just two months ago, the Government of Afghanistan and UNHCR organized an international conference in Kabul to consolidate a comprehensive strategy for the sustainable return and reintegration of the country's refugees and displaced persons. This was cited as a positive expression of regional cooperation in the recent Security Council report on its mission to Afghanistan. However, the success of the conference will depend on a resolute follow-up process by all stakeholders, based on a strengthened national and international commitment to security, governance and economic and social development.

In Iraq, with the improved security situation, UNHCR is working hard to help the Government create appropriate conditions for the voluntary return and sustainable reintegration of refugees and internally displaced persons. However, there is a long way to go. Voluntary return must take place in safety and dignity. It is therefore imperative that States preserve the asylum space that they have made available to Iraqi refugees throughout the past five years in the region and beyond. More than 2 million Iraqis are still hosted mainly by Jordan and Syria in a very generous way and a similar number remains displaced inside Iraq.

I call on the world's more prosperous States to offer full support to those countries and organizations that are bearing the brunt of the Iraqi exodus, both by means of material assistance and through the expanded provision of resettlement opportunities to those vulnerable Iraqis for whom voluntary repatriation will not be a viable option.

To prepare for returns, we redeployed the UNHCR representative in Iraq from Amman to Baghdad in March 2008, and we have also established an international presence in Erbil, Mosul and Basra. We have national staff in 11 of the country's governorates and plan to further expand our presence and activities in Iraq as the evolving security

environment permits. Beyond security, sustainable return to Iraq will require effective action in the areas of property restitution, or property compensation for those unable to go back to their places of origin, and full and equitable access to welfare services and public distribution systems.

In Darfur, an appalling humanitarian and human rights disaster persists. More than 2 million persons remain displaced internally and, just in Chad, nearly a quarter of a million Sudanese have sought refuge. Without a political agreement that involves both the Government of Khartoum and the different rebel movements, there is a risk that the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur will be unable to meet the security expectations of the affected populations. This would represent a terrible blow to the people, first of all, but also to the credibility of those organizations and the international community as a whole. Even if a comprehensive peace agreement can be established, the international force strengthened and impunity ended, a massive investment will be needed to re-establish the social, economic and environmental equilibrium of the area, ensuring harmony between different ethnic groups and between farmers and herders, and overcoming the tensions created by dwindling water resources and high population growth rates.

In Somalia, the hardships endured by the people are well known to the Council. With more than a million Somalis already dependent on food aid, any further limitations on humanitarian access could lead to additional population displacements of a daunting magnitude. Preserving the capacity of the World Food Programme to continue its food distribution programme in southern and central Somalia is absolutely essential with the complex political situation that currently prevails. The burden placed on neighbouring States, including Kenya, Yemen and Djibouti, is already enormous. Any further deterioration would stretch regional capacities beyond the breaking point and could generate a catastrophe of unprecedented proportions.

UNHCR is not present in Gaza. A sister agency, UNRWA, was created before UNHCR existed to address the needs of Palestinian refugees in the area. While we may not be directly involved, it is impossible for me not to make reference to the current political and humanitarian crisis. In Gaza, the civilian population is not even allowed to flee to safety elsewhere. I want to express UNHCR's firm solidarity with UNRWA's action and to call for a strict adherence to humanitarian principles in and around Gaza, including respect for the universal right to seek and enjoy asylum.

Beyond this first group of interrelated conflicts, others have been multiplying and deepening around the world. But contrary to the situations I have just examined, they generally lack international attention, largely because their impact is local or at best regional. They are normally not perceived as having implications for global security. The Central African Republic is a typical example. Although it is on the agenda of the Security Council, few in the world are aware that some 100,000 refugees have been forced to flee to Chad and Cameroon and that more than 200,000 of its citizens are internally displaced, in conditions of grave deprivation.

We might discuss many other crises around the world, but I will focus on one particular situation because of its importance to the work of both the Security Council and my Office: the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The attention of the international community has recently been concentrated on North Kivu. To echo my earlier remarks, there is no humanitarian solution to that conflict. The solution must be political and involve the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, other regional actors and the international community as a whole. The current tragedy in North Kivu has a complex historical heritage arising from colonial rule and exacerbated more recently by the Rwanda genocide and two Congolese civil wars. The solution must also address the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda presence in the area, the persistence of which threatens to undermine any peace agreement. And peace will be short-lived if the underlying problems of access to land, property, citizenship, inter-ethnic relations and the representation of minorities are not resolved.

But the Democratic Republic of the Congo is not just North Kivu. We have recently witnessed some significant population displacements in Ituri and Orientale province. Serious human rights violations persist in South Kivu, targeted predominantly at women and girls, and every six months the number of people who die unnecessarily in the country as a result of armed conflict and material deprivation is equivalent to the number of people killed by the 2004 Asian

tsunami. Only the Security Council has the legitimacy to lead the efforts of the international community to bring this wholly unacceptable situation to an end. UNHCR is prepared to play its part, but our role and capacities are obviously limited.

Just as patterns of conflict are becoming more complex, so too are contemporary forms of displacement. While the relationship between forced displacement and armed conflict is long-standing and well understood, the links with other phenomena, such as climate change, extreme poverty and poor governance, are not. As a result of climate change, natural disasters are on the increase. They have become more frequent, intense and devastating in their human impact, reinforcing the potential for displacement. The same applies to drought and the rising level of oceans. The full impact of the current financial meltdown and economic recession, following the recent food and energy crises, will have a strong impact on the developing world and it seems inevitable that more and more people will be on the move. Conflict, climate change and extreme deprivation will interact and strengthen each other as causes of displacement. UNHCR is striving to analyse and respond to these developments — an objective that I believe we share with the Security Council.

Refugees are people who have left their country because of persecution or armed conflict, and they benefit from the specific protection regime established by international law. No such legal framework exists for other people who have been forcibly displaced, other than the general human rights instruments that are applicable to all. In drawing attention to this issue, UNHCR is not seeking any expansion of its mandate or to broaden the established definition of a refugee. But I believe we have a duty to promote a serious discussion on new forms of forced displacement, the protection gaps that are emerging and the possible forms of collective response.

I would now like to turn to three particular challenges for the international community in responding to humanitarian crises. All three centre on the work of the Security Council but also have important implications for my Office. And all three exemplify the complex relationship that exists today between the imperative of maintaining peace and security and that of ensuring the effective delivery of protection and humanitarian assistance.

First is the challenge of peacekeeping in situations where there is no peace to keep, and its relation to the protection of civilians. Security Council resolutions 1296 (2000) and 1674 (2006) reiterate that the deliberate targeting of civilians in situations of armed conflict remains a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law. While the protection of civilians is primarily a responsibility of States, the Security Council is increasingly called upon to pursue that goal when States are unable or unwilling to discharge their responsibilities.

As a humanitarian agency, UNHCR has limited capacity to provide physical security for its beneficiaries. In some situations, ensuring the security of camps and maintaining their civilian and humanitarian character are possible only with the support of peacekeepers. In eastern Chad, for example, we anticipate that the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad will play a crucial role in discouraging attacks on camps, preventing the recruitment of children and reducing the threats of banditry and sexual violence. UNHCR welcomes the recent Council resolutions reinforcing the capacity and the role of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in protecting civilians in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the opportunity they provide to give effect to resolution 1820 (2008), on combating sexual violence against civilians, particularly women and girls.

However, in situations in which there is no peace to keep, mandates for the protection of civilians must be sufficiently clear and strong and must be supported by appropriate levels of political and material support. Many peacekeeping operations start in a situation of relative tranquillity, only to be affected later by a deteriorating security environment. It is not my intention to opine on peacekeeping doctrines, but I am glad to know that those issues will be at the centre of the Security Council's forthcoming debates.

A second challenge in today's environment is that posed by the concurrent needs to ensure staff security and to deliver humanitarian protection and assistance. Humanitarian personnel are deployed in the most dangerous places in the world. Many risk their own lives in the effort to help vulnerable populations to preserve theirs. Ensuring staff safety must be a top priority of every humanitarian organization and of the United Nations as a whole. That is non-negotiable.

And yet, with the evolving nature of armed conflict, the deliberate targeting of humanitarian workers has increased, creating a tension between the imperatives of staff safety and effective humanitarian action. That issue continues to give rise to acute dilemmas. In Somalia last year, UNHCR staff members were bombed in Bossaso, shot at in Garowe and taken hostage in Mogadishu. The security risks could hardly be greater, and yet the nature of UNHCR's work requires us to be close to those whom we seek to help. And the way in which we are perceived by local populations and the relevant actors is, to be frank, usually more important to our security than the armoured cars at our disposal or the barbed-wire fences we may erect. We will never be able to eliminate risk entirely, but I believe that we can collectively do better in managing it.

The third challenge I wish to address is that of preserving humanitarian space in the context of an integrated United Nations presence. In UNHCR's experience, once a peace consolidation process is under way, an integrated presence can provide an effective framework for collaboration between humanitarian agencies and the political and security components of the United Nations system. For UNHCR, such partnerships are particularly valuable in pursuing solutions to displacement in transitional contexts. We currently enjoy constructive partnerships with the United Nations Mission in Liberia, with the United Nations Integrated Office in Burundi and, in southern Sudan, with the United Nations Mission in the Sudan, to cite just three examples.

However, where conflict is still ongoing, there must be a balance between ensuring a coherent approach across the United Nations system and preserving the autonomy of humanitarian action, rooted in the fundamental principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence. That is particularly crucial in situations in which humanitarian agencies are operating in highly politicized and militarized environments. That will not always be easy. We rely on the wisdom of the Security Council to support the establishment of arrangements that are pragmatic and flexible, based on solid common sense and tailored to the specifics of each situation.

As I have already observed, solutions to armed conflicts must of necessity be political in nature. However, once peace is achieved, it needs to be supported in a variety of ways. That is a shared responsibility, and the peacebuilding architecture established by the United Nations provides a vital resource in that effort, as do the peacebuilding missions mandated by the Security Council. Those efforts complement and facilitate the work of my Office, most notably by supporting the voluntary return and sustainable reintegration of refugees and displaced persons. Indeed, the scale of return and the success of reintegration are two of the most tangible indicators of progress in any peacebuilding process.

Such processes have in many instances been obstructed by a failure to resolve outstanding land and property issues in an effective and equitable manner, especially in situations in which refugees, displaced persons and ex-combatants return simultaneously to communities where land tenure has never been formalized or where the land registration system has broken down. A collaborative approach to addressing those challenges is crucial. The experience of the Peacebuilding Commission in Burundi is particularly relevant in that regard.

The involvement of refugees and internally displaced persons in peace processes can provide critical perspectives on the causes of conflict and can contribute to a sense of shared ownership in peacemaking and peacebuilding. The engagement of women, as envisaged in resolution 1325 (2000), is of particular importance. UNHCR recently facilitated the participation of Sudanese refugees in Chad in peace discussions, and a similar approach is being explored in the Central African Republic.

I value the impetus provided to such efforts by the Security Council in its presidential statement of May 2008 on post-conflict peacebuilding (S/PRST/2008/16), as well as by the reference in resolution 1830 (2008) to the need to create conditions conducive to the voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable return of refugees and internally displaced persons in Iraq.

The international community has struggled for many years to ensure that conflict is followed by lasting peace and effective governance and that the destruction of livelihoods and the provision of emergency relief are succeeded by a process of sustainable development. There is still a long way to go. Nonetheless, I am encouraged by the recent attention to that issue and am confident that it will

remain among the permanent concerns of the Security Council.

It goes without saying that the search for solutions to which I have just referred is essentially reactive in nature, dealing with the effects rather than the causes of crisis. The most effective means of addressing the issue of forced displacement is through preventive activities that anticipate and avert the conflicts that oblige people to abandon their homes and seek safety elsewhere.

Prevention is, in my view, the most important element of the responsibility to protect. While some aspects of the concept of the responsibility to protect remain controversial, I do not believe that prevention is among them. Indeed, the notion of preventing and removing threats to peace is to be found at the beginning of the very first Article of the United Nations Charter.

Effective prevention will require a carefully balanced, coordinated and targeted combination of measures in the political, diplomatic, developmental, environmental and humanitarian domains. Effective prevention will require that action be taken by a wide range of stakeholders, including States, United Nations entities, regional bodies, international financial organizations and non-State actors. And, in our increasingly interconnected and interdependent world, effective prevention will require new networks and coalitions to be formed, linking those who are working to promote human security at the level of the local community with those who are striving to attain the same objective — human security — on a national, regional and global basis.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Guterres for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to members of the Security Council.

Mr. Urbina (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome the convening of this meeting and the detailed briefing just given by Mr. António Guterres, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The information he conveyed today is of essential importance in our opinion, and we believe that such briefings should become common practice as they enable the Council and the members of the Organization to keep abreast of the situation of refugees in general and in the field. Our attention to specific circumstances should not distract us from the need to periodically analyse the situation in general, which would allow us to evaluate our own actions in the medium and the long terms and to take corrective measures when necessary.

When the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was set up more than 50 years ago, it was believed that a temporary mandate would be enough to address the situation of people displaced by the war in Europe. Today, we know that we were mistaken. Forced displacement has not only been a constant and insidiously perpetuated phenomenon, but has also become increasingly complex and global, requiring the permanent attention of this Organization.

The situation in Gaza, which still has us on tenterhooks, testifies to the magnitude of the challenges facing the international community. Those who seek refuge or who are displaced by a conflict become double victims every time the international community in general and the Council in particular fail to solve the conflicts that force them to abandon their homes. Those hundreds of thousands of people, about whom Mr. Guterres has spoken to us today, are first the victims of the actions of some and then victims of the inaction of others.

Just as Gaza cries out for concrete action, effective responses and sustainable and rapid solutions, the displaced and the refugees in the Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Chad, the Central African Republic, Somalia, Georgia, Afghanistan, Iraq and, unfortunately, many other regions in the world demand from us comprehensive, serious, responsible and courageous treatment. We have said this before, but will never tire of repeating it. While there remain on the Council outright defenders of those whose actions cause the forced displacement of whole populations, we shall continue to be part of the problem and not of the solution.

We are all partly responsible for this. Those who raise their voices to criticize actions today remained silent on other actions of the past. For that reason, Mr. Guterres's briefing should serve as a wake-up call for us to review our actions in depth.

Despite its small geographic size, Costa Rica was a refuge for many thousands of people who fled from wars in Central America throughout the 1980s, and we continue to receive significant inflows of people today

who have been forced to flee their countries of origin. These painful circumstances have enabled us to clearly understand the links between forced displacement and peacekeeping, especially in situations where mass displacements threaten the stability of the places of origin, transit and destination and which represent a huge challenge for the effective protection of people throughout the displacement cycle.

For that reason, my delegation understands that the evolution and complexity of this issue require it to be placed in the wider context of the protection of civilians, where respect for international law, international cooperation and timely and decisive action by the United Nations are essential. When we speak of the protection of civilians, we are essentially speaking about respect for legality and international law. For that reason, the protection of civilians should always be the highest focus of political strategy in any effort to settle conflicts and a key element in post-conflict actions and in peacebuilding processes. It is necessary at all times to ensure the cooperation of all parties to a conflict in order to create areas of security, neutral zones or humanitarian corridors that will permit either evacuation or the distribution of aid to the affected populations.

While we emphasize the importance of permitting access to those who require refuge and the responsibility of complying with international obligations, especially with the principle of non-expulsion or non-refoulement, we acknowledge the need for greater international cooperation in those countries that have received huge flows of refugees.

It is clear that both the old and the new challenges that we face today are essentially of a practical nature. In this context, there is an obvious need to make greater efforts in early warning and rapid and decisive responses to crises. This work should involve the United Nations and its agencies, in close cooperation with the Security Council.

We are seriously concerned by current trends whereby displacement is no longer a phenomenon linked only to conflict but has become a military strategy and a terrorist tactic. It is alarming to note the persistence of military and bandit attacks on refugee camps and the increase in sexual violence, arms trafficking and the recruitment of children that frequently take place within the camps themselves. Those occur in conjunction with the typical problems and needs in the spheres of health and education that perpetuate and exacerbate the vulnerabilities already exposed by forced displacement.

Today, we stress the importance of strong mandates to protect civilians as a key aspect in the design and composition of peacekeeping missions, as well as the need for clear guidelines that enable effective protection throughout the whole displacement cycle, from evacuation to the provisional establishment of camps for refugees and internally displaced persons.

We need greater resources to expand surveillance, information collection and patrols in areas of conflict where there is considerable risk of attacks against civilians. It is absolutely indispensable that peacekeeping missions in situations, such as those in Darfur or the Democratic Republic of the Congo, be suitably structured and provided with the equipment and technology necessary to duly comply with their mandate to protect civilians.

In conclusion, strengthening coordination between the political, humanitarian and military dimensions is critical not just to guarantee the security of aid personnel and the humanitarian space necessary to care for refugees and displaced persons, but also to adequately transition from the early stages, where priorities lie in the realm of safety, protection and covering basic needs, towards recovery and the re-establishment of order and the rule of law in order to guarantee the respect and promotion of human rights.

Finally, I would like to thank UNHCR and its staff all over the world for their work. We recognize that in many cases they must care for years for those who have nowhere else to go to assure their continued existence. I stress the need for our support to be extended to efforts to prevent and effectively resolve the conflicts that are the cause of the displacement and suffering witnessed by the High Commission and other United Nations agencies on a daily basis.

Mr. İlkin (Turkey): I wish to join previous speakers in welcoming and thanking High Commissioner António Guterres for his comprehensive and thought-provoking briefing.

I would first like to take this opportunity to express our deep appreciation to the High Commissioner and the entire staff of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for their hard work. Their dedication to

improving the lives of millions of refugees is most commendable.

It is our firm opinion that the work of UNHCR is an essential element of our collective efforts to maintain international peace and security. Thus, we very much welcome the opportunity to engage with the High Commissioner. In this regard, I listened very carefully to his briefing.

Unfortunately, the current security environment and the evolving security challenges of our time are not helping us to bring down the number of refugees. On the contrary, the overall number of refugees, together with other populations of interest to UNHCR, has risen dramatically in recent years. That development, which is an outcome of worsening security conditions in many parts of the world, has now become a security problem in itself. Indeed, there are now around 67 million forcibly displaced people in the world, giving rise to much bigger challenges for the countries involved, as well as for UNHCR.

That said, it is obvious that no single international organization or individual country can cope with a problem of this magnitude. International cooperation and solidarity are imperative. Yes, UNHCR is playing a leading role in this field, but it deserves the support of everyone concerned, including that of the Security Council. And, on this point, the question that needs to be answered is how the Security Council can further support the work of UNHCR.

This is indeed very important to us, as Turkey is deeply committed to supporting the efforts and activities of the Organization. And I have to underline that this is not merely a humanitarian consideration for Turkey; far more than that, it represents a hard-core reality for us, given our close proximity to areas of conflict in the Middle East, the Balkans and the Caucasus, producing high number of refugees in and around our country.

Throughout history, the Turkish people have always welcomed, extended a helping hand and provided safe haven to people who have fled oppression and violence. For instance, in the not-too-distant past, Turkey hosted vast numbers of refugees fleeing from either the wars in the Balkans or the repression of the former Iraqi regime. I am sure that many here will recall the time when we provided shelter and protection to more than 500,000 Iraqis during the first Gulf War. It was a daunting responsibility which we had to shoulder without sufficient international support at that time. But, in the end, we managed to perform a successful operation. Unfortunately, Iraq today is again faced with a serious displacement crisis. Although this time it is mainly Syria and Jordan that have taken the brunt of the refugee flow, Turkey also hosts a considerable number of Iraqi refugees.

Despite recent improvements in the security conditions prevailing in Iraq, the refugee problem is still a serious one and requires continued international support. In this regard, we would like to commend the work done by UNHCR from the very early stages of the crisis and reiterate our pledge to continue to support UNHCR's Iraq programme.

Likewise, we also highly appreciate UNHCR's latest efforts with respect to the situation in Gaza and in support of its sister organization, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). In this regard, we join in the High Commissioner's strong appeal to the international community and all humanitarian actors to support UNRWA. The situation in Gaza is indeed tragic and totally unacceptable, and requires immediate action on the part of the United Nations and the Security Council.

That brings me to my final point, which is the importance of providing the necessary resources to UNHCR. Indeed, reliability and continuity in donor contributions constitute a major element of our efforts to address the refugee problem. Without such commitment on the part of the international community, we cannot expect organizations like UNHCR to deliver what is expected of them. And without an effective UNHCR, we cannot expect to fulfil our responsibilities in maintaining global peace and security.

That is why Turkey is a regular contributor to UNHCR's main budget and its various programmes, ranging from the Middle East to Africa. Here, I would like to assure the High Commissioner once again of Turkey's continued support to the activities of UNHCR, as well as our firm determination to support all international efforts aimed at improving the lives of displaced people worldwide.

Mr. Takasu (Japan): I thank the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. António Guterres, for his briefing. It is timely and useful, as the

plight of over 40 million people displaced from their homes remains precarious and serious in many parts of the world, including Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, Darfur, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and elsewhere. In addition, there are 26 million people displaced by natural disasters.

This morning, I should like to comment on three issues. The first is the root causes of displacement.

As the High Commissioner has pointed out, the tragic phenomenon of displacement is growing increasingly complex. More and more people are being forced to move not only because of conflicts and persecution, but also as a result of extreme poverty, natural disasters and environmental degradation. As he noted, we are also all too aware of the negative impact that climate change and the global food crises are having on those refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). We need to address these root causes so that the number of displaced persons does not continue to swell. As the root causes are different in each case, there is no single policy measure which can resolve the issue worldwide.

However, particularly in the context of the Security Council's responsibility, I am convinced that conflict prevention is one of the most effective measures to reduce displacement. Peacebuilding efforts to prevent the recurrence of conflict are indispensable to addressing protracted refugee situations. The reintegration of displaced persons should be accorded a higher priority as we develop and implement integrated peacebuilding strategies, which has begun very well in the context of the Peacebuilding Commission.

The second issue is finding durable solutions. The protection of those who are forced from their homes is naturally the most urgently needed first step. However, to achieve a durable solution, it is necessary not only to protect but also to empower refugees and IDPs. We believe that assistance for return and reintegration, such as vocational training and education for returnee children, is essential in seeking a durable solution. Japan has placed emphasis on the empowerment of vulnerable people, particularly refugees and IDPs and the women and children among them, and on an integrated approach by promoting the human security perspective. I am very grateful to the High Commissioner for mentioning that in his closing remarks. We very much look forward to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) continuing to strengthen a people-centred approach in implementing its programme. People must always be at the centre of our attention.

The third point is the safety and security of humanitarian personnel. The staff members of UNHCR and partners, implementers and other humanitarian personnel on the ground are selflessly devoting themselves to helping those most in need, very often in difficult and dangerous situations. It is a source of deep concern that casualties among humanitarian personnel are on the rise and that humanitarian workers are increasingly becoming a target of attack, which is totally unacceptable.

We call upon all parties concerned to take appropriate action to secure humanitarian space, fully respecting the neutrality and impartiality of humanitarian assistance. As a matter of great urgency, we must find a way to meet the challenge of securing humanitarian space and the safety and security of all who operate within it.

A number of peacekeeping operations authorized by this Council have a mandate to protect humanitarian workers. Many Security Council resolutions contain calls to the relevant parties concerned to secure the safety and security of humanitarian workers.

However, we are very often disappointed with the reality. We wonder if this relates to the problems emanating from the mandate of the mission itself or the structure and capacity of the mission or support mission to implement these mandates. These are the questions we must answer in detail. We in the Council need to consider actively any improvement we have to make to protect the workers more effectively. We hope that the study jointly commissioned by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs on the implementation of Security Council mandates on the protection of civilian lives will analyse this issue in depth and come up with recommendations for action.

We also welcome the recent adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 63/139, designating 19 August as World Humanitarian Day in order to raise public awareness about humanitarian activities worldwide.

In conclusion, Japan has consistently been a strong supporter of and one of the top donors to UNHCR, and we are very pleased with this. During a

recent visit by the High Commissioner, my Government conveyed to him its continued support and its recent decision to become the first Asian country to accept refugees from Myanmar for resettlement.

I wish to commend the High Commissioner for his strong leadership in addressing the issue of displacement effectively by making UNHCR a more decentralized and field-oriented organization. We hope to see UNHCR engaging even more effectively in its vitally important activities to assist people.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I thank you, Mr. President, for giving us the opportunity to meet today and to hear from the High Commissioner for Refugees. We are very grateful to him not only for his comprehensive and thoughtful statement, but also for the work he does in leading what is obviously a very dedicated team of people for the United Nations around the world. We signal our appreciation today for the leadership of the High Commissioner, both in driving his Office through an ambitious programme of structural reform and in forging stronger relationships with other key actors from within and without the United Nations system. It was salutary to hear what he said about the kidnappings and the deaths that his workers and other United Nations workers are subject to around the world. I would like to use this occasion, through him, to pay tribute to them and their families.

I was also very pleased that we were able to hear a little bit from Ambassador İlkin about countries that support the refugees by taking them in and providing them with shelter and protection. As the High Commissioner and the Ambassador said, that too is a very important part of the equation.

It is clear from the briefing that we have received today that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is active across the range of the Council's business in Afghanistan, Darfur and Iraq. Of course, as the High Commissioner said, they are not the agency that is active in Gaza, but Gaza is obviously very much on our minds today as debate continues in New York and as we all watch the developing situation on the ground.

I would like to start by echoing the Commissioner's admiration for the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in acutely challenging circumstances, and in particular for the bravery of United Nations workers trying to relieve suffering in Gaza. The escalation of violence in Gaza and southern Israel has caused immense suffering and shortages of humanitarian supplies. We join others in calling for immediate humanitarian access and the provision and distribution of supplies in accordance with international humanitarian law. We welcome any initiatives that bring about a pause in hostilities to allow the provision of humanitarian help. I think it is clear to all of us that more is needed, before any resolution to this conflict, and most immediately through a ceasefire. We also condemn acts of violence and terror directed against civilians in the region. My Foreign Minister, along with the French Foreign Minister and others both inside and outside the Council, are still in New York, searching for a way forward as a contribution to resolving the conflict.

I would like to take this occasion, more generally, to recall the commitment of my Government to upholding the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol and to support the mandate of UNHCR to protect refugees and find durable solutions to their plight. We know that the majority of people uprooted by conflict and violence do not cross international borders, but nevertheless can find themselves in situations of extreme vulnerability. We strongly support the responsibilities of UNHCR for internally displaced persons and other populations affected by conflict, as part of the inter-agency cluster approach.

I would like to take this opportunity to encourage the High Commissioner to see what can be done to deepen the involvement of UNHCR with the cluster approach and to further develop its relationships with other stakeholders. We expect good things to come out of the UNCHR/Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs retreat, and look forward to hearing more about that.

That leads me to another point the High Commissioner made about the potential distinction between the work of UNCHR when a conflict is ongoing and its work alongside other agencies in the aftermath of that conflict, when the immediate situation has been eased. I know from personal experience that in the latter situation, it is important to have an integrated approach if we actually want to get success on the ground. But what he said about the distinction was something that might offer fruitful grounds for work in the future.

We talked a little bit today about the changing causes of forced displacement. The High Commissioner raised some very interesting questions on that. It seems to my Government that the current protection framework is adequate, if it is implemented. I think that is another important point. In terms of prevention and response, the increasing complexity described by the High Commissioner raises again the issue of the need for effective partnerships.

The protection of civilians in conflict is also a theme that many people will be interested in today. I was also pleased to hear the responsibility to protect and the need for effective prevention mentioned. It is clear that members of the Council do not yet have a unified view about how to take the responsibility to protect forward. It is in its early stages. It is a new concept that we all need to work hard to elaborate and operationalize in an effective manner in order to get help to where it is most needed and help Governments discharge their primary responsibility to protect their populations.

We would welcome, in connection with responding to and preventing protection crises, more regular and ad hoc briefings to this Council by the High Commissioner. In turn, we believe we should make better use of UNHCR expertise when we formulate mandates for peacekeeping operations. I would be grateful if the High Commissioner, in his response, would say something about the evolving thinking of UNHCR on voluntary return. I know that in certain circumstances there has been a debate within the Organization and elsewhere in the international community about whether refugees should be encouraged to return only to their places of origin — that is, their original homes — or whether they should be allowed to resettle in majority communities in their own country. It would be interesting to hear if there is any update on that debate.

I would like to turn, as my last point, to peacebuilding. We welcome UNCHR support for and involvement in the upcoming report of the Secretary-General on post-conflict peacebuilding and early recovery. That report is an opportunity to put in place a more effective international response to assisting countries in the immediate aftermath of conflicts. That is a response that can provide coordinated, prioritized and adequately resourced support to national efforts.

Mr. Bui The Giang (Viet Nam): I, too, thank the French presidency for convening this meeting, which, we believe, serves as a good preparatory step to contribute to the open debate of the Security Council planned for next week on the protection of civilians in armed conflicts. I welcome High Commissioner Guterres to the Council and thank him for his timely, comprehensive and informative briefing.

We recognize the efforts made to date and the resulting progress in initiatives on repatriating refugees and reintegrating them into their own communities. My delegation, however, is deeply concerned about increasing displacement in many parts of the world and the expanding number of stateless persons, as High Commissioner Guterres has warned about, as well as challenges in protecting refugees in conflict areas and ensuring humanitarian access to them. We are dismayed at the fact that refugees in conflict areas — first of all, women and children — continue to fall victim to killing, maiming and all sorts of gender-based violence.

The current situations in Afghanistan, Pakistan, some South Asian countries, vast areas of Africa and, most notably, in Gaza are clear and typical testimony to that. With 1.5 million inhabitants of the Gaza Strip being victimized in a terrible manner, this humanitarian crisis has been an appalling example of the magnitude of the suffering that human beings can be driven into, and it has provided living evidence of the imperative need for greater and better humanitarian efforts.

Given the gravity of the situation, and while again confirming the primary responsibility of States in meeting the humanitarian needs of their respective civilian populations, we wish to emphasize that it is critical to enhance the role of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and its coordination with other relevant United Nations entities, such as the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in conducting humanitarian operations, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations in addressing displacement and violence against civilians and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in tackling child-related issues, et cetera. In that regard, United Nations field missions also have an important role to play.

It is our view that, in order for humanitarian activities to be effective and efficient, humanitarian

access must not be politicized, but must instead strictly adhere to the principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence and must be in conformity with national and international law. While underlining our consistent position that the resolution and prevention of conflict, the reduction of poverty and the improvement of living conditions for populations in conflict areas are true remedies for the root causes of humanitarian issues, we also believe that greater focus should be placed on repatriation and reintegration. This should, inter alia, pool the efforts of multiple stakeholders, including the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Development Fund for Women, the World Food Programme, the World Bank and, of no less importance, local, regional and international non-governmental organizations and civil society groups, which can help ensure effective repatriation and sustainable integration, thus contributing to the process of post-conflict reconstruction.

Mr. Tiendrébéogo (Burkina Faso) (*spoke in French*): I wish at the outset to thank Mr. António Guterres for his very instructive briefing. We are grateful to him and to the staff of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for their dedication and their leadership in protecting and assisting refugees.

The ongoing scourge of refugees and internally displaced persons resulting from conflict and from natural disaster is a matter of grave concern today. Worldwide, tens of millions of refugees and displaced persons live in extremely difficult conditions, because of overcrowding in camps, volatile security and humanitarian conditions, extreme poverty and disease, not to mention numerous and repeated violations of their most basic rights, in some cases by the very people responsible for protecting them.

Attacks against camps for refugees and displaced persons, the militarization of such camps, the forcible recruitment of children in the camps and increasing sexual violence are simply unacceptable and demand vigorous action on the part of the entire international community.

The tragedy of refugees is closely related to the question of international peace and security and therefore requires special attention by the Security Council, in particular with respect to the mandates of peacekeeping operations. These should be continually adapted on the ground in order to ensure better protection for refugees and displaced persons. Here, it would be appropriate to strengthen the capacity of peacekeeping operations, and indeed to review their configuration, as is currently being done with the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is also necessary to ensure that their personnel are given appropriate training in human rights and ethics, in order to protect against abuses of the rights of refugees and internally displaced persons.

States first and foremost, and also parties to conflict, bear the responsibility to protect civilians, including refugees and internally displaced persons — particularly the most vulnerable among them: women and children. They must create conditions conducive to protecting the rights of refugees, in accordance with international instruments in force. This process also entails strengthening the existing legal foundations and establishing favourable conditions for stability, sustainable peace, building the rule of law and good governance and promoting preventive diplomacy.

Unfortunately, most host countries are themselves facing difficulties. They do not always have the resources they need to shoulder their responsibilities. That is why the international community should provide them with all necessary support. In that regard, we wish once again to commend the commitment and leadership of UNHCR. Such collective action must be complemented by regional organizations and bodies in order to ensure an integrated, inclusive and participatory approach.

Africa, in which the largest number of refugees and displaced persons are located, views this issue as a true problem of development. It is thus a challenge that must be met as quickly as possible. That is why the forthcoming adoption of a convention on protection of and assistance to displaced persons will be a milestone in mobilizing African countries. We are certain that our continent will always be able to rely on UNHCR.

In conclusion, my delegation wishes to endorse the views expressed by many other speakers, in support of refugees and displaced persons in Gaza.

Mr. McMahan (United States of America): On behalf of the United States, I would like to thank the High Commissioner for his excellent briefing this morning and for his work, and that of his able staff, to protect and assist refugees throughout the world.

As he noted, the work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has become increasingly complex and dangerous. The number of refugees is rising, as is the number of people who are internally displaced by armed conflict. These developments have important implications for the international community as a whole and for UNHCR in particular. Today, I would like to make five points.

First, the United States remains deeply concerned about the number, complexity and severity of conflicts and violence that lead to forced displacement, as well as attacks on refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) where they have sought refuge, and increasing attacks on humanitarian workers and peacekeepers. Refugees and IDPs are too often the victims of such conflict and frequently lack protection from physical attack, gender-based violence, abduction, forcible recruitment and other serious abuses. We must work to ensure the safety of these vulnerable populations, as well as of UNHCR staff and their implementing partners. Deliberate attacks on humanitarian workers, especially local staff and their families, remain a significant impediment to life-saving aid in many crises, and we must all work together to guarantee their safety and security.

Secondly, protracted civil conflicts continue to create some of the largest situations of forced displacement and are a tragic reminder that civilians are at times deliberately targeted. The number of people fleeing conflict and violence and becoming internally displaced far exceeds the number who are crossing international borders to become refugees. The United States calls on Member States to protect those whose lives or freedom are threatened by civil conflict and to support coordinated efforts by humanitarian organizations with protection mandates and expertise.

The scope of UNHCR's work has been expanded to include internally displaced persons affected by conflict, and we have seen that much of its advocacy, policies and funding are expanding to meet the growing humanitarian demands around the world, particularly in addressing the many cases of forced displacement. While we welcome that expansion, it is imperative that UNHCR's leadership and comparative advantage on refugee protection issues are not weakened as it finds the proper balance between its various objectives. UNHCR's core mandate to protect refugees must remain at the centre of its mission and activities.

Thirdly, the United States remains gravely concerned about the ongoing and widespread use of sexual and gender-based violence in conflict situations throughout the world. That is one of the most significant protection challenges facing the international community and is too often ignored. Sexual and gender-based violence must be more effectively addressed, including both in refugee and IDP situations, and we call on all Member States to end that gross injustice.

We believe that prevention of and response to gender-based violence should begin at the onset of every emergency. The United States strongly encourages UNHCR and all humanitarian assistance actors to integrate programming to counter gender-based violence into their efforts. Those approaches should be multisectoral and aim to combine protection activities, community services, health care and referral services into humanitarian assistance operations.

The United States strongly supports the efforts of the United Nations and the international community, such as Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008), to secure a dramatic increase in women's participation in all aspects of peacebuilding and security. While progress has been made in that regard, we look forward to working with UNHCR and other United Nations agencies to ensure that the empowerment of women in substantive and institutionalized leadership roles continues to improve.

Fourthly, the United States agrees on the importance of maintaining humanitarian space in the context of integrated United Nations missions. Due consideration must be given to allowing the Organization's humanitarian agencies to carry out their mandates to deliver humanitarian assistance in a neutral and impartial manner. Some situations may call for United Nations humanitarian agencies to integrate strategically with United Nations missions, while maintaining a degree of operational separation in order to preserve their ability to assist populations in need in environments where conflict exists.

Fifthly, the humanitarian and protection needs of refugees and others of concern are met most effectively when United Nations Member States demonstrate the will, including politically and financially, to make the international system work. As donors we must do a better job, coordinating aid programmes and avoiding

duplication, while ensuring flexibility in our funding through UNHCR so that it can carry out its mandate.

Finally, I would like to say a few words about the current situation in Gaza. We must remain focused on the urgency of the humanitarian situation. We are very concerned about the humanitarian situation in Gaza. Israel has taken steps to ensure the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the people of Gaza, but, as Secretary Rice said yesterday, the people of Gaza need to be in a position to be able to get a lifeline to goods, supplies, sanitation and medical help.

The United States remains a steadfast and committed partner of UNHCR. We are fully invested in its policies, programmes and performance. We know UNHCR's work is never easy, and we salute its staff for what they do in environments that are often difficult. The United States will continue to work cooperatively and generously with other Member States, UNHCR and our own non-governmental organization implementing partners to find durable solutions for refugees around the world.

Mr. Mayr-Harting (Austria): At the outset, Sir, let me thank you for this possibility of an exchange with the High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. António Guterres. We would like to welcome High Commissioner Guterres and thank him for his informative and thought-provoking briefing. Let me also add that we believe that more frequent and regular briefings by the High Commissioner to the Council, including country-specific briefings, would be extremely useful.

The displacement of people across and within borders is an important element in most of the situations on the Council's agenda. That shows that there is a strong nexus between peace and security, on the one hand, and refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) on the other. In light of the rising number of uprooted persons, Austria attaches great importance to the work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and would like to commend the High Commissioner for his leadership and for the organization's tireless efforts in recent years.

In his analysis, the High Commissioner referred to an accumulation of adverse trends and causes of displacement, such as competition for scarce resources, poverty, conflict and climate change. Austria shares his concerns about those trends, which are leading to a growing number of people on the move. We have to ask ourselves how the Security Council can enhance its responses to those challenges.

I wish to highlight particularly the impact of climate change and its implications for human security, and even for the security of States. Incidentally, that is also a matter on which the European Union (EU) has invested quite some thought. The potential of climate change to aggravate the situation of vulnerable groups, notably women and children, and its nature as a major cause of migration and displacement make it an urgent concern. In that context, Austria wishes to draw attention to the activities of the Human Security Network in identifying the implications of climate change on human security.

Austria welcomed the initiative to organize an open debate in the Security Council in April 2007 to examine the relationship among energy, security and climate change. That debate (*see S/PV.5663 and S/PV.5663 (Resumption 1)*) highlighted the extent to which those issues are interrelated. The Council should therefore continue to keep the issue under review.

As regards the interplay between peacekeeping operations and humanitarian activities, Austria believes that it is worth highlighting the role of the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad and the United Nations-mandated EU military operation in eastern Chad and the north-west Central African Republic. Their primary focus on increasing the security of Darfur refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) is, in our view, a good example of how the work of the Council can contribute to the improvement of humanitarian situations. In today's very critical situation, it is also evident that the humanitarian aspect must be at the core of the deliberations of the Council on the situation in Gaza.

On the issue of post-conflict peacebuilding, we fully share UNHCR's view that the safe and voluntary return of displaced populations plays a crucial role in peacebuilding efforts and is a key component of durable peace. Peacebuilding activities should, therefore, take into consideration the specific needs of displaced populations and of their receiving communities. The advancement of regional protection programmes is particularly important, and capacity-building in the region of origin needs to be advanced. Austria highly appreciates and supports the intensive efforts of UNHCR to facilitate the voluntary return and

reintegration of displaced persons. I would like to use this opportunity to ask the High Commissioner whether there are lessons to be learned from UNHCR's experiences in ensuring the sustainability of refugee returns.

Finally, we agree with the High Commissioner on the importance of improving the participation of refugees and internally displaced persons in peace processes and negotiations. That is a particular challenge as far as IDPs are concerned. In that context, Austria also welcomes the initiative of the Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons, Professor Walter Kälin, to develop, together with the Department of Political Affairs, a draft guide for mediators on integrating issues of internal displacement into peace processes and peace agreements.

Given the important, but in many cases underestimated, role of women in peacebuilding efforts for their communities, we also would be interested to hear what lessons UNHCR can share from the implementation of its gender policy and efforts to actively involve women in all aspects of its work.

I wish to conclude by wishing the High Commissioner all success for his highly important work for the international community.

Mr. Heller (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you very much, Sir, for organizing this meeting, which I believe to be particularly useful. We welcome the High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres, and would like to start by congratulating him on his briefing to us today, above all on the integrated vision he gave us of the work of the Office that he is heading in such a complex world and his leadership in fulfilling its mandate.

We believe it is of fundamental importance for this sort of meeting to take place periodically, as my colleague from Austria has already stated, because that would enable us to pay more attention to the aspect of refugees and internally displaced persons in our consideration of many conflict situations.

As the High Commissioner stated, there is a need not only to react to situations that arise around the world, but also to take a preventative approach in a timely manner. It is alarming that the decreasing trend in the number of refugees has not continued but that it has been reversed, with the number of refugees now reaching more than 15 million. I believe that the vision of a future preventative approach that has been suggested is very interesting, in particular in response to the impact of climate change, natural disasters and, of course, the effects of conflicts. I also believe that it will be very important to bear in mind that we are in the midst of a global crisis, in which food, energy and economic crises have combined to have a very severe impact on the internal political stability of vulnerable countries. Accompanied by the effects of climate change, I believe that these conditions may trigger growing flows of economic refugees or migrants. I believe it is very important to bear that in mind. In this context, I should also like to recall that Mexico and Japan have been working jointly within the United Nations to promote the consideration of human security from a preventative perspective, emphasizing a global approach.

Mexico is deeply concerned by the continuation of forced displacement, a phenomenon of many nuances, in which affected populations, in particular vulnerable populations, continue to come under attack. I think that, of all the conflicts mentioned, there is not one in which this is not the case. In this regard, I agree on the need for robust mandates and clear guidelines for the protection of refugees. I believe that it is very important to contribute to this integrated vision and to remain focused on the attacks suffered by humanitarian workers and local staff, in particular in their own countries, as several previous speakers have said.

Mexico has developed a very constructive collaborative relationship with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which goes back to the time of the Central American crisis in the 1980s, when thousands of Guatemalan refugees sought refuge in our country. Given these more than 25 years of experience, we believe it very important to strike a balance between efforts to accommodate displaced persons and peacekeeping activities.

The High Commissioner spoke of three significant challenges. I think the three challenges he mentioned require an increasingly integrated response from the United Nations system. UNHCR does not exist in a world of its own, isolated from the activities of other United Nations entities. We believe that the vision of UNHCR has to be present in the Council's analysis and consideration of specific problems. Addressing the problem of Gaza without talking about

political issues makes no sense. This question should not provoke an existential crisis, as we know that these are very complicated crises in which many different elements must be addressed. In this regard, I would like to reassure the Council that, in considering the conflicts on the Council's agenda, Mexico will bear in mind the question of refugees and the necessity of cooperation with UNHCR.

Finally, I would like to reiterate that we believe that exchanges between the Security Council and UNHCR should be more frequent, taking place at least twice a year.

Mr. Rogachev (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I thank Mr. Guterres for his interesting briefing on the topic of refugees and their impact on situations in the area of peace and security. Russia welcomes the constructive involvement of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in addressing existing humanitarian problems in relevant situations, including those on the agenda of the Security Council.

We share the view that the issues of ensuring security and complying with the core norms and standards of international law in the area of refugees are interdependent and complementary. At the same time, we note once again that any projects in the area of protecting the rights of refugees and addressing problems of forced displacement in general in post-conflict countries should complement overall efforts in the area of peacebuilding and subsequently reaching settlements and also contribute to these processes. Furthermore, we would like to underscore the importance of coordinating UNHCR activities with the Governments of relevant States.

Conflicts continue to be the primary reason that there are many refugees and internally displaced persons worldwide. The grim prize of first place continues to be held by Iraq, with more than 2.5 million refugees and about 2 million internally displaced persons, most of whom have been deprived of their ability to meet their own basic vital needs. Their problems need to be addressed immediately. Beyond the specifically humanitarian aspect, these challenges put a heavy burden on the host countries, especially Syria. The developments of recent weeks once again demonstrate the need to seek long-term solutions in the area of the Middle East settlement, in particular as it relates to the problems of Palestinian refugees. We urge UNHCR to be prepared to cooperate more closely with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, including in coping with possible new flows of refugees.

We welcome the readiness of UNHCR to seek ways to address the situation of Afghan refugees. This problem also puts a heavy burden on host countries, above all Pakistan and Iran. We are gravely alarmed by the problems of displaced persons with regard to the situation in the Sudanese province of Darfur. Our hopes for an improvement in the situation there are related above all to the establishment of a process for political negotiations and the deployment of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur.

We share the view expressed by Mr. Guterres with respect to the UNHCR mandate and believe that it is necessary to continue to draw a clear distinction between UNHCR's activities in providing assistance to refugees and assistance to internally displaced persons. Whereas the former fall under the mandated functions of UNHCR, for the latter, UNHCR interventions are warranted only when a number of core conditions are met, the primary condition being that the relevant country has made a request in advance. We believe that the core responsibility for providing assistance to internally displaced persons lies specifically with the Government of the country where such displacement is occurring.

A critical function of UNHCR in the context of post-conflict settlement is, in our view, to provide assistance in facilitating the sustainable voluntary return of refugees, which is the preferable means of addressing the issue of forced displacement. Failure to address that issue could well result in the emergence of new conflict situations, which in turn could threaten international peace and security. At the same time, UNHCR should also have a plan prepared for cases in which, for various reasons, it is impossible to implement the scenario of voluntary returns; here, the integration of displaced persons in host States or third countries would be required.

In many States with situations on the agenda of the Security Council, ensuring the security of refugee camps is an urgent problem. That is particularly the case in conflict zones in Africa: Darfur, Chad, the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In that regard, we call on UNHCR to

continue to give priority attention to the demilitarization of camps for displaced persons and to separating combatants from persons who are entitled, under the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol, to claim refugee status.

Once again, the Russian Federation thanks the High Commissioner for his briefing and the French presidency of the Council for convening this meeting. We hope that there will be continued constructive cooperation between the Security Council and UNHCR.

Mr. Vilović (Croatia): We, too, welcome today's briefing and would like to thank High Commissioner António Guterres for providing us with a comprehensive overview of the current global trend regarding refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) as it pertains to the role of the Security Council and the challenges that such situations pose to regional and international peace and security.

Given the fundamental interlinkages among peacekeeping, peacebuilding and humanitarian activities to achieve durable peace, Croatia is concerned to learn that there has been an upward trend in terms of the number and the complexity of refugee and IDP situations worldwide since the High Commissioner's previous briefing, in 2006 (see S/PV.5353). In addition to old crisis areas, there are relatively new ones. There can be no solution to the refugee and IDP crisis without political commitment. At the same time, we commend the UNHCR staff for its tireless work in the conditions described in the High Commissioner's briefing. Those members of the Security Council who visited a number of crisis-affected areas in Africa in June can attest to that. Croatia believes that, in addressing contemporary forms of threats to peace and security in a world of increasingly interconnected threats, new and emerging causes of forced displacement are intrinsic factors that cannot be overlooked by the Council in its future work.

In the light of the Council's forthcoming debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, the High Commissioner's briefing is particularly timely in underscoring the importance of protecting the physical security of refugees and IDPs as well as of humanitarian workers, which is called for in a number of Security Council resolutions. Croatia is especially concerned by the increased use of sexual violence as a tool of war and in post-conflict refugee situations. While recognizing the need to protect all vulnerable members of refugee populations, including women and children, Croatia is committed to safeguarding women's rights in conflict situations and continually seeks the strengthening of the role of women in all aspects of post-conflict peacebuilding.

With regard to the situation in Gaza, Croatia hopes that the agreement on opening up a humanitarian corridor will be adhered to by all sides for the benefit of the civilian population there. It is our hope that today's briefing will serve as a catalyst for resuming the practice of regular briefings by the High Commissioner to the Council. Croatia believes that such briefings would prove to be a value-added asset for the Council's comprehensive approach in establishing or renewing increasingly complex, multidimensional peacekeeping and peacebuilding mandates.

We hope that, in addition to the existing global and universal international legal instruments, an African Union convention for the protection of and assistance to internally displaced persons will soon be adopted and enter into force, and that its implementation will involve coordinated activities that will lead to the alleviation of the refugee and IDP crisis in Africa, which is the part of the world most affected by that crisis.

Finally, drawing on Croatia's first-hand experience working with UNHCR and on lessons learned in dealing with our own refugee and IDP situation during an armed conflict and in the ensuing post-conflict years, we would like to reaffirm Croatia's full support for the High Commissioner's mandate.

Ms. Zhang Dan (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to thank the French presidency of the Security Council for convening this meeting and Mr. António Guterres, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, for his briefing, which was highly beneficial to the work of the Council.

Over the past year, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has made progress in the three areas of voluntary returns, local integration and resettlement, and China expresses its appreciation for that progress. At the same time, we have noted that the total number of refugees throughout the world has grown to 11.4 million and that the number of internally displaced

persons (IDPs) is also steadily increasing as a result of armed conflicts and natural disasters.

Armed conflict, political turmoil, economic stagnation, poverty and underdevelopment remain the main causes of the intractability and aggravation of the refugee problem. In addition, factors such as the security environment, mixed flows and environmental degradation have made it more difficult to protect refugees. In the current circumstances, the international community should continue to follow the principle of international solidarity and shared responsibility and should strengthen international cooperation on the basis of mutual respect, equality and mutual benefit in order to fulfil our common responsibility for addressing the refugee issue.

Ending regional conflicts and maintaining an environment of safety and security remain the fundamental ways to resolve the refugee problem. The majority of the national and regional conflicts on the agenda of the Security Council are accompanied by serious refugee problems, and the majority of United Nations peacekeeping missions are mandated with the tasks of protecting civilians and safeguarding humanitarian assistance. The Council must further enhance its coordination and collaboration between the areas of conflict mediation and peacekeeping, on the one hand, and refugee protection and humanitarian assistance, on the other, to ensure that peacekeeping operations create an environment conducive to the repatriation and social reintegration of refugees with a view to facilitating a lasting solution to the problem of refugees and IDPs.

Mr. Butagira (Uganda): I thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this important meeting. I would like to commend Mr. António Guterres for his exemplary leadership and his entire organization for protecting and looking after the unfortunate people who, through no fault of their own, have found themselves to be refugees or internally displaced persons.

He touched upon a number of very important issues. However, before I make a brief comment on that, let me reaffirm the commitment of Uganda to host a special African Union summit on internal displacement. We assure Mr. Guterres and the Council that Uganda will do everything possible to make the meeting a success.

Mr. Guterres touched on the issue of internal displacement. As the Council knows very well, the issue of internal displacement is the responsibility of the sovereign State and not a matter within the mandate of the High Commissioner for Refugees. Recently, we have witnessed displacement, especially in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which is the result of the brutal activities of the so-called Lord's Resistance Army. Many people have been displaced. This is just one example of internal displacement.

In circumstances where internal structures or State institutions have collapsed and therefore the State cannot shoulder its responsibility to protect its citizens, the question arises: What will the international community do? Mr. Guterres was quite right in referring to the issue of the responsibility to protect. As the Council knows, that issue was touched on by the 2005 World Summit, and it was endorsed. Unfortunately, nothing has moved to make it a reality, and there are many issues concerning sovereignty which no one wants to touch. Yet, in my opinion, perhaps it is high time that the Council took the lead in reactivating this issue and in finding out how we can put into practice that principle endorsed by the World Summit. Obviously, one cannot simply watch helplessly as no one else cares for the internally displaced people. I think if we address that, it could go a long way towards helping the internally displaced.

Mr. Guterres also touched on prevention. Obviously, it is far cheaper to concentrate on prevention than to address the results of a catastrophe. Quite rightly, Mr. Guterres emphasized prevention. This is a broad concept that applies not only to programmes that you can put in place, but also to issues of governance. It is important to note that some internal displacement is the result of poor governance and poor democratic institutions in a country. This must be addressed.

I do not believe that, in matters concerning the responsibility of the Council in maintaining international peace and security, we should avoid very watertight compartments. When does a matter fall under the ambit of the maintenance of international peace and security? Obviously the lines are very difficult to define, but it is equally unacceptable that the issue not be addressed. Roles have been defined very narrowly and therefore issues are left out that should have been addressed, such as that I touched on earlier regarding democratization.

I want to be brief. In my concluding remarks, I would like, once again, to commend Mr. Guterres for his exemplary leadership which he has shown, as usual, in addressing these issues.

Mr. Dabbashi (Libya) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to echo those who have thanked Mr. António Guterres, High Commissioner for Refugees, for his thorough briefing on the issues of refugees and displaced persons. We commend the efforts of the High Commissioner to meet the humanitarian needs of refugees worldwide. We are grateful to him and his staff for their sacrifices.

No one can doubt that issues relating to refugees and displaced persons, particularly in Africa and the Middle East, are among the major problems drawing the attention of the international community. Over the past several decades, those two regions have seen major conflicts and natural disasters. Consequently, millions of people have been displaced from their homes to regions that they considered to be safer, either within or outside the borders of their country. These movements of people have sparked numerous problems, specifically due to tensions between the refugees and the local populations. Hence, the important humanitarian role played by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in terms of assisting and protecting refugees and displaced persons.

When we consider the global geographic breakdown of refugees, we see that there are more than 15 million refugees, 6.6 million of whom are Palestinians; and more than 65 million displaced persons worldwide. The largest number of refugees and displaced persons is in Africa and the Middle East, and specifically in the occupied Palestinian territories and neighbouring countries. There are also refugees from Iraq, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia and the Sudan.

As the Council is aware, the countries hosting refugees are responsible for assisting and protecting them. National Governments, with the help of the international community, are also responsible for addressing the humanitarian and security problems of refugees. At the same time, we believe that the ideal solution for addressing the problems of refugees and displaced persons lies in setting conflicts, returning refugees to their homes and reintegrating them by providing them with jobs and development in their countries of origin. This should be undertaken through national efforts and effective partnerships with the international community.

Libya endured colonization and fascist persecution for three decades, during which thousands of Libyans fled the country. It therefore understands all too well the current suffering of Palestinians. No one can doubt their suffering, and specifically the suffering of two thirds of the population of Gaza, under the Israeli occupation. Approximately 1 million refugees live in Gaza and have been subjected to bombing and artillery fire over the past two weeks. The total embargo does not allow them to escape this holocaust, which, unfortunately, imitates Nazi methods, but with modern means of destruction and killing. As of yesterday, those methods had caused the death of more than 700 Palestinians, including 219 children and 89 women. By this morning, the number of those killed had risen to 763.

I must mention here that many refugees from Gaza had to leave their homes as long ago as 1948. They were again forcibly displaced in 1967, this time towards Gaza. They currently have no other option than to die in this holocaust from which they cannot flee. There is no other outcome for them but death, and only death.

That is the goal of the Israeli authorities, who are in flagrant violation of international law, in the context of total silence by the Security Council. This silence can only be interpreted as support for the aggression and as indifference to the souls of innocent victims on the part of those who are preventing the Security Council from shouldering its responsibilities.

In this context, I take this opportunity to commend the work done by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), led by Ms. Karen AbuZayd. I welcome the courage shown by UNRWA staff in Gaza and throughout the occupied Palestinian territories despite the grave dangers that they face and their being repeatedly targeted by the Israeli occupying forces.

The international community must be generous and respond to the urgent appeals made by UNRWA eight days ago from Gaza. Our hope is that we will soon hear a briefing from Ms. Karen AbuZayd, Commissioner-General of UNRWA, and that arrangements will be made for her to make this briefing to complement the briefing that we heard

today, so that we can get a thorough picture of the situation.

We in the Security Council need to take practical steps to ensure the protection of civilians in time of war and to protect them from any threat by any party. We need to remove all obstacles to humanitarian assistance. We also need to require the parties concerned to meet their international obligations and the other obligations they have already undertaken so that we in the Council will be able to meet our responsibilities.

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of France.

First of all, I would like to thank the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for having accepted the Security Council's invitation to give us a briefing today. The previous meeting that the Council had with the High Commissioner was in 2006, and France would like to express the hope that such meetings will occur more frequently in the future, since we find them to be particularly useful for both bodies. I would also like to thank the High Commissioner for his very useful and informative briefing and for his tireless work and that of his Office in circumstances that are often difficult.

France is deeply concerned by the increasing number of refugees and of displaced persons as a result not only of conflict but also, as indicated by the High Commissioner, of a number of other factors that give rise to political tensions, including extreme poverty, lack of access to natural resources, the food and fuel crises and the consequences of climate change. The international community must ensure that these populations are protected, as is their right.

We are also, along with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), very concerned about the situation of long-term refugees. More than 5 million refugees around the world have been living in exile for longer than five years. The international community must commit to lightening the burden of the host countries, including by undertaking efforts for the return of refugees who are particularly vulnerable. In this regard, France welcomes the choice of the issue of long-term refugees as the theme of the upcoming 2009 session of the UNHCR Executive Committee.

France also welcomes the progress achieved in finding lasting solutions to the plight of refugees, whether through voluntary return when the security situation allows it, as for example in Angola, Liberia and southern Sudan, or through local integration, as in Tanzania, Nigeria, Serbia and Central Asia.

France further welcomes the large-scale return of Afghan refugees that has been taking place since 2001. But the question of refugees represents a huge humanitarian, political and security challenge for Afghanistan and its neighbours. We encourage the strengthening of regional cooperation in order to create conditions for the dignified, lasting and voluntary return of refugees, with the support of the international community.

We are concerned about the serious obstacles to the return to Abkhazia and South Ossetia of those displaced by the conflict in Georgia. We would like to recall here that the International Court of Justice has ordered the parties to refrain from any acts that would impede their freedom of movement and from taking any discriminatory measures.

In this regard, and more generally, the link between emergency humanitarian responses and short- and long-term development and integration strategies is too often lacking. In order to ensure what is commonly called transition, France supports the establishment of comprehensive strategies to ensure sustainable returns. We also support the adoption by UNHCR and the lead agencies of a sectoral approach to protecting internally displaced persons, and we recall in this regard the importance of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.

The primary responsibility for the protection of and assistance to displaced refugees falls, of course, first and foremost on States, and the international community must, within the United Nations framework, assist States in protecting such populations. When national authorities are clearly not guaranteeing the protection of their populations, the international community must intervene. We therefore attach the highest importance to the effective implementation of the responsibility to protect. We have undertaken that commitment and we owe it to those populations, who are suffering.

In this regard, the Security Council has a specific role to play, since the displacement of populations is often the direct result of threats to international peace

and security and could contribute to destabilizing entire regions, and since displaced people are vulnerable and could be subjected to grave violations of international law and of international human rights and humanitarian law, including in the camps that take them in. The Security Council has the responsibility to prevent and put an end to such violations. Who could forget the acts of sexual violence used as weapons of war that victimize so many in the Kivus, Darfur and many other situations?

In this context, the Council has decided to include in the mandates of peacekeeping operations the responsibility to protect civilians, in particular refugees and persons displaced by armed conflict. That is seen in mandates such as those of the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT), the European Union military operation in the Republic of Chad and in the Central African Republic and the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC).

While cooperation between peacekeeping operations and humanitarian actors is essential, we cannot confuse humanitarian action and peacekeeping. Like UNHCR, France attaches great importance to respect for humanitarian space, which is necessary to ensure access to populations in need and the safety and security of humanitarian personnel.

With regard to the issue of humanitarian access, the adoption of resolution 1844 (2008) on Somalia has allowed us to sanction those who hinder the delivery of humanitarian assistance. We welcome the partial reiteration of the text of that resolution with respect to the sanctions regime for the Democratic Republic of the Congo defined by the recently adopted resolution 1857 (2008).

The issue of humanitarian access in general is, of course, critical in helping us better to address the problems of refugees and displaced persons. We cannot fail to consider, for instance, the hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons fleeing the fighting in Mogadishu; we cannot fail to consider Darfur, Kivu, Iraq or Afghanistan; nor, of course, can we fail to consider the current situation in Gaza.

I wish in general to recall the importance which the Security Council must attach to the protection of civilians. That dimension, too, is naturally at the heart of France's actions, alongside its close partners, with respect to the situation in Gaza, as demonstrated by the presence, today and in recent days, of its Minister for Foreign Affairs, Bernard Kouchner, and several of his counterparts in New York, and by its ongoing efforts.

Finally, and above all, I would recall that long-standing population displacements are usually linked to the fact that the armed conflicts and human rights violations that have led people to flee remain unresolved. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the situation of Palestinian refugees and displaced persons are particularly striking examples of that and testify to the importance of working for the political settlement of conflicts, peacebuilding and the implementation of national reconciliation processes that guarantee human rights in order to resolve the problem of refugees and displaced persons. I assure the High Commissioner that we are highly sensitive to that fact and to the essential role of the Security Council in that regard.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I call on Mr. Guterres to respond to the questions and comments raised.

Mr. Guterres (*spoke in French*): I thank you, Sir, and the representatives of member States for their extremely useful and profound contributions to this debate. Many of them mentioned their interest in our meeting more often. I am entirely at the Council's disposal. I am convinced that there is no humanitarian solution to humanitarian tragedies; the solution is always a political one. Dialogue with the Security Council is, for us, an absolute priority in the framework of our inter-institutional cooperation. As I said, I am always available to the Council.

(*spoke in Spanish*)

To the Ambassador of Costa Rica, I should like first to express my admiration for his country and Latin America in general as traditional hosts to refugees. Mexico, with its borders of solidarity, cities of solidarity and solidarity-based resettlement programme, has one of the world's best action plans for the protection of refugees. I believe that the example set by Costa Rica is of great importance to the world today, where tolerance is critical to ensuring the protection of refugees.

The Ambassador of Costa Rica spoke of the need for stronger international solidarity. It is true that most refugees are in countries of the South, and that most wish to return to their homes. They do not want to

emigrate to wealthier countries; they want to go home. If that is to be possible and they are to be protected upon their return, institutional solidarity, especially between the developed and developing worlds, is absolutely essential.

He also discussed the range of problems in protecting civilians and the absolute need to guarantee the humanitarian and civilian nature of refugee camps. That issue has been raised in many statements. It is tragic to note all the victims of massive human rights violations and violence, the terrible suffering of women and the forcible recruitment of children that take place in refugee camps, and that we are powerless to stop it. The intervention of peacekeeping forces is often absolutely critical in that regard.

(*spoke in English*)

I would like to express my gratitude to the representative of Turkey and to underline one aspect in which Turkey is at the very centre of our action. Turkey is not only an asylum country, it is also a country of transit. We are in a situation today in which we are witnessing increasingly mixed flows of population, the majority being economic migrants, but also including refugees, asylum seekers and women and child victims of trafficking, who are in need of international protection.

With the role of smugglers and traffickers and the way such movements of populations take place, it is sometimes very difficult to detect those people and to grant them physical access to the territory to present their claims and receive fair treatment for those claims. The experience of our cooperation in Turkey in this regard is extremely important to us. I should also like to express my gratitude for the appeal made by the representative of Turkey for financial support for the activities of my Office.

This is indeed a difficult moment for humanitarian organizations. On the one hand, we have needs that are increasing everywhere; on the other, we, too, are the victims of the global financial crisis. I have been in Government myself; I am sure it is impossible for a Government not to do everything that is required to make sure that there is no meltdown of its financial system, so I fully understand the need to use hundreds of billions of dollars and other currencies in support of the financial systems, but I strongly hope that the same commitment will exist in support of human life and humanitarian action.

I should also like to express my deep gratitude to the Ambassador of Japan for his reference to the root causes of displacement and the needs of prevention. I think it is very important to underline that prevention is no longer only a political and diplomatic endeavour. To prevent conflict, it is necessary in many circumstances, for instance, to be much more effective in relation to support for adaptation to climate change, support for rural communities and the need to be able to allow people to live in their rural environments if they so wish. Migration should be an option; it should not be an obligation or a necessity.

Thus, to a certain extent, prevention has become a complex issue requiring a combined group of actions in which, of course, the political and the diplomatic will always be paramount but in which effective cooperation among the economic, social and environmental dimensions is also extremely important. Again, I would like to underline the importance of the concept of human security as a unifying concept for protection, assistance and solutions for refugees and other displaced persons.

The Ambassador made a meaningful number of references to the interrelated questions of safety and security in humanitarian action and the protection and preservation of the humanitarian space. I would like once again to emphasize that these are key questions for the success of humanitarian action in today's world.

Finally, I would like to congratulate Japan on the establishment of its pilot project on resettlement, which I hope will be successful and lead to a meaningful resettlement programme in the near future.

I would also like to express my gratitude for the statement made by the representative of the United Kingdom. First of all, I wish to say that we are deeply committed to fully supporting the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in its activities. We appeal for UNRWA to be effectively supported, financially and by other means, by the international community, and we hope that developments will move towards the achievement of full respect for humanitarian law in relation to the Gaza conflict.

The United Kingdom representative mentioned internal displacement and the commitment of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. I want to be very clear in saying that we are totally committed to playing our role.

As underlined by the United States delegation and the Russian delegation, our role is different in relation to refugees and in relation to internally displaced persons. In relation to refugees, we have a mandate, which is a very strong mandate, by the way, enshrined in international law. In relation to internal displacement, we are a member of a team, working together with other members of the team — never forgetting that the primary responsibility is the State's, but that, of course, the international community has a contribution to make.

We are totally committed to the cluster approach and to the development of its potential. Partnership is important not only in relation to internal displacement; as members said, it is important in peacebuilding and in early recovery. We are also fully committed to peacebuilding; from the very outset, we provided a member of our Office to the Peacebuilding Support Office. And, if I can be absolutely frank on this, we are extremely anxious to see early recovery work. I know that the United Kingdom Government is also very committed to this.

I would say that we might not need new international laws in relation to forced displacement when it does not relate to typical refugee situations as foreseen in the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. But obviously, there are protection gaps, and we need to make sure that, through adequate forms of partnership and cooperation, those protection gaps are filled. States have a key role to play on that. But it would also be interesting to discuss whether some improvement in international law could be useful, for instance in relation to temporary protection, just to give one example. There, I believe, there are some areas in which some clarification might be useful with respect to international legislation.

I thank the representative of Viet Nam. First of all, he made a reference to statelessness. Statelessness is a forgotten plight. It is dramatic for many people not to have nationality, not to have citizenship. They tend to be forgotten people, and their rights tend to be forgotten. My Office is doing its best to improve our capacity and our action in that regard. But I would like to draw the attention of the Council, and the international community as a whole, to the need to be much more effective — especially at country level — in addressing the problem of statelessness and in providing solutions for it. And I can only agree fully with what the representative of Viet Nam said in relation to the need to strengthen cooperation within the United Nations system and to ensure full respect for humanitarian principles: the very principles I underlined in my briefing.

(*spoke in French*)

I would like to thank the representative of Burkina Faso for his statement and to say that his region is one where, fortunately, we are seeing greater progress in addressing refugee problems. There have been massive returns to Liberia and to Sierra Leone, and there is hope for a solution bringing lasting peace to Côte d'Ivoire. There is reason for optimism regarding his region. I believe that the regional cooperation mechanisms that have been put in place are to a great extent responsible for success, with respect not only to conflict but also to humanitarian protection programmes and to the resolution of refugee issues.

I fully agree with what the representative of Burkina Faso said about the need to train personnel of peacekeeping operations. I think there is much to be done and much room for improvement in that regard. As I said with respect to the statement made by the representative of Costa Rica, there is a need to support host countries and communities that often share their meagre resources with refugees. I would also stress the need for rehabilitation — including environmental rehabilitation — in regions affected by refugee issues, once displacement has come to an end.

(*spoke in English*)

I would also like to express my deep appreciation for the statement made by the representative of the United States. First, he commented on protection challenges for refugees, for displaced persons and for the security of humanitarian staff, and he expressed concerns about internal displacement and the need to make sure that our work on internal displacement does not undermine our mandate regarding refugees. I must say that I do not see any contradiction between what we do with refugees and what we do on internal displacement. There has been no crowding-out effect; there has been no movement of resources from refugee programmes into internal displacement programmes. I think there has been a great deal of positive synergy: in many circumstances, we address problems that are similar within groups of population that stay together, even if their displacements are of differing natures.

I would also like to underline the importance of his comments on sexual and gender-based violence. In UNHCR's internal reform, one of our main concerns was to make sure that we would shrink our headquarters and spend less and less money on the organization and more and more money on our beneficiaries. We had 1,050 people in Geneva; we are now about 750, and in 2009 we will be reducing that to less than 700. What we are trying to do is to use the savings we make through our internal reform to address gaps in our action for beneficiaries. One of the gaps we tried to address with these savings was exactly the question related to sexual and gender-based violence in many of our programmes where, let us be honest, we are far from being successful, mainly because we do not have the capacity to deliver in such complex environments. There, the key security questions require the action of other actors, namely those with respect to which the Security Council has the authority to take decisions.

I would also like to thank the representative of the United States for his comments on how to maintain the humanitarian space. I think that the distinction made between the strategic dimension and the operational dimension can probably be a very important one. Clearly, there must be strategic coherence within the United Nations when it acts together in a given setting. But in some circumstances it is absolutely essential to preserve operational autonomy to make sure that the humanitarian space and humanitarian principles are fully preserved.

I would also like to thank the representative of Austria and to tell him how much I appreciated the clear linkage he established between peace, security and forced displacement, and the importance that he gave to climate change as a key factor in its influence on all global trends for the near future, in particular on trends related to displacement. Climate change generates displacement, and climate change is a factor that exacerbates conflict, which in turn generates displacement. Because of that, when we look at peace and security and when we look at displacement, I do not think we can forget the present and future impact of climate change on the mega-trends we will be witnessing in the twenty-first century. I am very happy that, as was noted, the Council will be debating energy security and climate change in April.

I am also very hopeful with respect to the work of the Council in guaranteeing a smooth transition between the European Union military operation in the Republic of Chad and in the Central African Republic and the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad in relation to the protection requirements we have in eastern Chad and the northern Central African Republic.

With respect to the lessons learned about sustainability, I think that it is important to underline that we are far from happy with the present sustainability of returns. In many circumstances, people return from a refugee situation to become irregular migrants in the next few months or in the next few years. The reason for that is not always linked to security. I would say that it is predominantly linked to the fact that economic development, job opportunities and access to education and health care are far from being guaranteed in post-conflict situations. Even though there has been enormous progress in the United Nations mechanisms to address these situations — with peacebuilding, with very important concepts such as that of human security — I think that we still see a combination of poor local government and dysfunction in the actions of the international community, which undermines the sustainability of returns and of solutions in general.

(*spoke in Spanish*)

I would like to thank the representative of Mexico for his comments. It is true that there is a global crisis, whose elements include conflict, the environment, the economy, energy and food. In that context, the response too must be global. In that global response, the whole issue of people in movement must, in my opinion, be at the centre of the concerns of the international community. I am in complete agreement on that matter. It is not just a matter of the problems of refugees or of forcibly displaced persons; what about the rights of economic migrants? That also requires attention.

I am speaking of a matter completely outside my mandate, but as a citizen of the world. I would say that in the near future the mobility of labour will make a greater contribution to world development, to the reduction of poverty than will other types of mobility. I think the international community should have a rational attitude toward migration in general. Unfortunately, many leaders have irrational attitudes that do not allow them to consider the positive aspects of migration. To deal with the positive aspects of

migration, to guarantee movement of regular migrations — much more important today in the context of irregular migration — is a very important contribution to the protection of refugees, who, in mixed movements of people, are often victims of situations in which human rights in general are difficult to apply.

We have discussed mandates. I think the issue of mandates is very clear, very important, the robustness of mandates, their clarity. But I would say that just as important as mandates are the practical material conditions in which mandates can be effectively carried out. Many times, it must be said, we are still far from having the full capacity to implement the mandates established by this Council in many of the operations.

(*spoke in English*)

I am extremely sorry I cannot speak in Russian, but I will try to address the intervention of the representative of the Russian Federation in English.

I wish to say how much we cherish our cooperation with the Government in relation to refugee protection. Indeed, the responsibility attributed by the 1951 Convention is attributed to the Governments themselves, and UNHCR has just a monitoring and supplementary role when Governments have not the capacity — namely, the economic capacity, in many parts of the world — to provide protection and assistance to the refugees. So indeed, cooperation with Governments is very high on our agenda.

I would also underline what the representative said about the need to support countries in the developing world that have been receiving huge numbers of refugees. He mentioned Syria; I would add Jordan in the same context, and Iran and Pakistan. We could go on — Uganda, Tanzania; many others around the world share their meagre resources. Many of them are not even signatories of the Convention but show a meaningful solidarity in relation to refugees.

The need to cooperate with UNRWA was mentioned. I can assure the representative that we are actively cooperating now, supporting UNRWA's activities in full respect for UNRWA's mandate. I think it is also very important from the point of view of UNHCR not to create confusion, which would not help solve the problem. With full respect for UNRWA's mandate, I strongly appeal to the international community to give UNRWA all it requires in the extremely difficult circumstances in which it currently operates, with enormous courage on the part of its staff.

Again, I wish to underline what I said about the clear distinction we make in relation to our refugee mandate and our actions with regard to internal displacement and the civilian character of asylum, and the need to preserve the integrity of asylum by preserving its civilian nature.

I would also like to thank the ambassador of Croatia. In this year's edition of our protection challenges dialogues, we had an extremely constructive contribution by the high-level Croatian delegation — two Vice Prime Ministers and the Minister of Justice, very strongly committed to engage in dialogue in order to find a durable solution to end situations that, we believe, no longer have a justification. Sometimes history goes ahead and some people are left behind, and it is time to bring the people back into history. I can only underline the importance of Croatia's contributions for that purpose.

I wish to express my deep gratitude also to the representative of China — and apologize also for not being able to speak in Mandarin — and to say how much we noticed his two comments, first on solutions and the importance of different groups of solutions in our action — I thank him for the recognition of our role on that — and then on the very strong linkage between conflict mediation and peacekeeping and refugee protection and humanitarian action, and the importance of dialogue between the Security Council and humanitarian agencies in order for that to be fully effective.

Once again I express my deep appreciation to the ambassador of Uganda for his country's decision to host the African Union summit on forced displacement. That summit will, hopefully, approve — I think all the conditions are now met for that — an AU convention on internal displacement. I think that will be an extremely important step. As I said in my intervention, it will be the first legally binding international instrument on internal displacement. As a matter of fact, as the ambassador said, it represents an effective translation of the responsibility to protect, at the African level.

I believe that the debate on the responsibility to protect has been a victim of the lack of trust in the

international community. There are different understandings about how the responsibility to protect can be implemented. One thing is clear. In the African Union there is now an agenda, a clear commitment to a strongly human-rights-minded approach to internal displacement. I really hope that that will be an example that will bear fruit in the international community and will allow for a more effective approach by the international community as a whole to the questions of internal displacement. I also wish to underline the very important comments on prevention.

Again, apologizing for not speaking Arabic, I thank the ambassador of Libya for his intervention. We have established very important cooperation with the League of Arab States. In the very near future — hopefully next month — the result will be the publication of a common book on the roots of modern refugee law in Arab tradition and Islamic law. As a matter of fact, when one looks at the 1951 Convention and its various aspects — non-refoulement, the civilian character of asylum, the need to protect not only refugees but families and to respect property — everything can be found in the Holy Koran and the Sunna and the Hadith of the Prophet. I think that publication will be a very important instrument, not only to strengthen refugee protection but also to pay tribute to what is a very important tradition in regard to recognition of refugee rights.

The ambassador mentioned the need to support local populations and to avoid tension between local and refugee populations. I think that is a key question. The majority of refugees are in the South, in the developing world, and local populations in many cases share very scarce resources. Just look at eastern Chad. Water resources are being shared by the Chadian population with a number of refugees from Darfur, who in many areas outnumber the Chadians themselves. So very strong solidarity with local populations is a key instrument to preserve asylum space.

The ambassador also mentioned the need to guarantee the sustainability of voluntary repatriation. I can only repeat what I said in that regard. I would like to mention again his appeal for full support for UNRWA. I also want to say that when one looks at the Gaza situation from the point of view of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees — there are many other perspectives that are beyond my mandate, but, from my perspective, what is more shocking is that that population does not even have the right to flee. We give protection and support to refugees who have fled conflict in many areas, and we try to help them endure their plight, and, one day, find a solution to their plight. But in this conflict people do not even have the right to flee, which, of course, makes the humanitarian dimension of the situation even more tragic.

(*spoke in French*)

I would like once again to thank the President for the invitation and also say that we have extensive cooperation with France as a country of asylum. Last year, France received the highest number of requests for asylum in Europe, and France also provides great supports to us in many of our activities throughout the world in various areas.

The President mentioned the issue of long-term refugees. In 2008, UNHCR's priority policy was precisely the situation of long-term refugees, and we hope that the next session of the Executive Committee will be able to adopt the outcomes of the thinking and dialogue that we had with the Member States, non-governmental organizations and other actors in December. But, certainly, the key issue is to find both political and humanitarian solutions. Last year, we helped 735,000 refugees return home — 735,000 helped by UNHCR worldwide. That is quite an impressive number. We presented 100,000 requests for resettlement prepared by UNHCR.

We note that in some States, and sometimes States that have huge development challenges, local integration is becoming acceptable. The most remarkable example is Tanzania, which accepted the naturalization of 170,000 Burundians from groups that had fled Burundi in 1972. Of course, this means the naturalization of their children and grandchildren, but it shows that there is generosity from host countries, which the international community must support, because integrating such a high number of refugees poses extremely complex development challenges.

I would also underscore what the President said about the responsibility to protect. I hope that the African example can be very significant in establishing a climate of trust that will facilitate a useful debate on that subject. I would like to underscore, too, all that the President said about humanitarian access, the humanitarian space, security for humanitarian action and the protection of civilians in general.

I would also like to say sincerely that when I look at the Security Council, I am a little envious of it. Recently, I had a minor infection and tried to solve the problem with aspirin, but aspirin did not clear it up. I needed an antibiotic. The tragedy is that at UNHCR we have only aspirin. The Council has the antibiotic.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the High Commissioner for the clarifications he has provided. Unfortunately, in certain cases antibiotics are less effective and not as quick as one would hope.

I would like to thank Mr. Guterres for his presence and for the extremely useful information he gave us. I think that the statements made by the members of the Council attest to their full support for the High Commissioner himself and the work of his Office and its staff. I believe that these statements also attest to our interest in having regular exchanges with the High Commissioner on the numerous challenges facing both his Office and the Security Council.

There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.